

MISS MISANTHROPE
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1734.

MISS MISANTHROPE BY JUSTIN McCARTHY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

COLLECTION

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS . . . 2 vols.
DEAR LADY DISDAIN 2 vols.

VOL. 1734.

THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS BY JESSIE M. WEAVER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BY

JUSTIN MCCARTHY,

AUTHOR OF "DEAR LADY DISDAIN," ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1878.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

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1872

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MISS MISANTHROPE.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. St. Paul's Mystery.

Two events occurring almost together affected a good deal some of the people of this story. The first was the death of Mrs. Saulsbury.

Miss Grey was at once invited by the lawyers who had the charge of her father's affairs to visit Keeton, in order to become fully acquainted with the new disposition of things in which she had so much interest. Thereupon Mr. Money announced that, as Miss Grey had no very close friend to look after her interests, he was resolved to put himself in the place of a parent or some near relation, and go with her and see that all her interests were properly cared for. Minola was unwilling to put him to so much trouble and loss of time, well knowing how absorbed in business he was; but he set all her remonstrances aside with blunt, good-humoured kindness.

"Lucy is coming with us," he said, "if you don't think her in the way; it might be pleasant for you to have a companion."

"I should so much like to go with Nola," pleaded Lucy.

"Oh, I shall be delighted if Lucy will go," Minola said, not well knowing how to put into words her sense of all their kindness. It was really a great relief to her to have Lucy's companionship in such a visit. Mary Blanchet did not like to go back even for a few days to Keeton. The poetess objected to seeing ever again the place where she considered that art and she had been degraded by her servitude in the Court-house. So the conditions of the visit were all settled.

But there arose suddenly some new conditions which Minola had never expected. The long-looked-for vacancy at length occurred in the representation of Keeton. The sitting member announced his determination to resign his seat as soon as the necessary arrangements for such a step could be put into effect. It was imperative that Victor Heron should lose no time in throwing himself upon the vacant borough. Mr. Money and Lucy rattled up to Minola's door one morning breathless with the news. Lucy's eyes were positively dancing with excitement and delight.

"It seems to me that there's going to be a regular invasion of your borough, Miss Grey," Mr. Money said. "We're all going to be there. You see that you are under no manner of obligation to me. I must have gone down to Keeton in any case; it's one of the lucky things that don't often befall a busy man like me to be able to kill the two birds with the one stone. I must take care of our friend Heron as well as of you. He would be doing some ridiculous thing if there were no elder to look after him. He is as innocent of the dodges of an English election as you are of the ways of English lawyers. So we'll be all together; that will be very pleasant. Of course we'll not interfere with

you—you shall be just as quiet as you like while we are doing our electioneering.”

What could Minola say against all this arrangement, which seemed so satisfactory and so delightful to her friends? It was not pleasant for her to be brought thus into a sort of companionship with Victor Heron. But it would be far less pleasant, it would indeed be intolerable and not to be thought of, that she should in any way raise an objection or make a difficulty which might hint of the feelings that possessed her.

“After all, what does it matter?” she asked herself as Mr. Money was speaking. “I shall have to suffer this kind of thing in some way for half my life, I suppose. It is no one’s fault but my own. Why should I disturb the arrangements of these kind people because of any weaknesses of mine? If women will be fools, at least they ought to try to hide their folly. This is as good practice for me as I could have.”

So she told Mr. Money and Lucy that any arrangement that suited them would suit her, and that she would be ready to go the moment he gave the word. Then Mr. Money hastened away to look after other things, and Lucy remained behind “to help Nola with her preparations,” as she insisted on putting it, but partly, as Minola felt only too sure, to talk with her about Victor Heron.

Since Heron had offered her his advice in the Park, and she had put it aside, Minola and he had only met once or twice. Then he had attempted, the first time of their meeting, to renew his apologies, and she had put them lightly away, as she already had done the advice, and had given him to understand that she

wished to hear no more of the matter. She had hoped that by assuming a manner of indifference she might lead him to forget the whole affair. But he did not understand her, and really believed that he had lost her friendship for ever by the manner in which he had spoken against Herbert Blanchet. He was troubled for her much more than for himself, believing, or at least fearing, that she had set her heart on a man unworthy of her. He kept away from her therefore, assuming that his society was no longer welcome, and resolute not to intrude on her.

Minola had hoped that the worst was over, and that he and she were likely to settle gradually and unnoticed by others into a condition of ordinary acquaintanceship. This melancholy hope, to her a cruel necessity in itself, but yet the best hope she could see now left for her, was likely to be disturbed for a while by this ill-omened visit to Keeton.

Minola was busy making her preparations for going to Keeton, and with a very heavy heart. Everything about the visit was now distressing to her. The occasion was mournful; she dreaded long talks and discussions with Mr. Saulsbury; she dreaded meeting old acquaintances in Keeton; she shrank from the responsibilities of various kinds that seemed to be thrust upon her. When she left Keeton she thought she had done with it for ever. Where was the free life she had arranged for herself? Nothing seemed to turn out as she had expected.

Meanwhile Mary Blanchet and Lucy Money were both delighted, and in their different ways, at the prospect of Minola's visit to Keeton. Mary saw her leader and patroness come back rich, and ready to be

distinguished and to confer distinction. Lucy Money had the prospect of variety, of a holiday with Minola whom she loved, and of being very often in the society of Victor Heron. Minola was, if anything, made additionally sad by the thought that it was not in her power to share their feelings, and the fear that she might seem a wet blanket sometimes on their happiness.

Lucy had been with her all the morning, helping her with Mary to make preparations for the journey. Minola was glad when it was found that some things were wanting, and Lucy and Mary offered to go out and buy them in Oxford Street.

Minola was enjoying the sense of being alone, and was, at the same time, secretly accusing herself of want of friendship because she enjoyed it, when a card was brought to her, and she was told that the gentleman said he wanted to speak to her, if she pleased, "rather particular." The card was that of Mr. St. Paul. He had never visited Minola before, nor was she even aware that he knew where she lived. She was surprised, but she did not know of any reason why she might not see him. She hastened down to her sitting-room, and there she found Mr. St. Paul, as she had found Mr. Blanchet once before. Mr. St. Paul looked even a stranger figure in her room than Mr. Blanchet had done, she thought. He seemed far too tall for the place, and had a heedless, lounging, half-swaggering way which appeared as if it were compounded of the old manner of the cavalryman and the newer habits of the Western hunter. Nothing, however, could have been more easy, confident, and self-possessed than the way in which he came forward to

greet Minola. If he had been visiting her every day for a month before, he could not have been more friendly and at his ease.

"How d'ye do, Miss Grey? Just in time to see you, I suppose, before you go? I've been down to Keeton already. I'm going down again—I mean to make my mark there somehow."

Minola thought, with a certain half-amused, half-abashed feeling, of the remark she had heard concerning herself and Mr. St. Paul, but she did not show any embarrassment in her manner. Indeed, Mr. St. Paul was not a person to allow any one to feel much embarrassment in his presence. He was entirely easy, self-satisfied, and unaffected, and he had a way of pouring out his confidences as though he had known Minola from her birth upwards.

"I hope you found a pleasant reception there."

"Yes, well enough for that matter. I find my brother and his wife are not anything like so popular as I was given to understand that they were. I saw my brother in London—didn't I tell you?—before I went down to Keeton, you know."

"No, I did not know that you had seen him; I hope he was glad to see you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Not he; I dare say he was very sorry I hadn't been wiped out by the Indians. Do you know what being wiped out means?"

"Yes, I think I could guess that much. I suppose it means being killed?"

"Of course. I mean to teach you all the slang of the West; I think a nice girl never looks so nice as when she is talking good expressive slang. Our British slang is all unmeaning stuff, you know; only consists

in calling a thing by some short vulgar word—or some long and pompous word, the fun being in the pompousness; but the Western slang is a sort of picture-writing, don't you know?—a kind of compressed metaphor, answering the purposes of an intellectual pemmican or charqui. Do you know what these things are, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, yes; compressed meats of some kind, I suppose. But I don't think I care about slang very much."

"You may be sure you will when you get over the defects of your Keeton bringing-up. But what was I going to tell you? Let me see. Oh, yes, about my brother and his wife. The honest Keeton folks seem to have forgotten them. But I was speaking, too, about my going to see my brother in town. Oh, yes, I went to see him; he didn't want me, and he made no bones about letting me know it. He thinks I have disgraced the family; it was quite like the scene in the play—whose play is it?—I am sure I don't remember—where Lord Foppington's brother goes to see him, and is taken so coolly. I haven't read the play for more years than you have lived in the world, I dare say, but it all came back upon me in a moment. I felt like saying 'Good-bye, Foppington,' only that he would never have understood the allusion, and would think I meant to say he was a 'fop,' which he is not, bless him."

"Then your visit did not bring you any nearer to a reconciliation with your brother?"

"Not a bit of it—pushed us farther asunder, I think. The odd thing was that I told him I wanted nothing from him, and that I had made money enough for myself in the West. You would have thought that

would have fetched him, wouldn't you? Not the least in life, I give you my word." And Mr. St. Paul laughed good-humouredly at the idea.

"I am sorry to hear it," said Minola. "I think there are quarrels and spites enough in the world, without brothers joining in with all the rest."

"Bad form, isn't it—don't you think? But I don't suppose in real life brothers and sisters ever do care much for each other—do you think they do? I haven't known any such cases; have you?"

Minola could not contribute much from her own family history to demonstrate the affection and devotion of brothers; but she had no idea of agreeing in the truth of Mr. St. Paul's philosophic reflections, for all that.

"I believe what you say is true enough as regards the brothers, but I can't admit it of the sisters."

"Come, now, you don't really believe that nonsense, I know."

"Believe what nonsense? That sisters may be fond of their brothers sometimes?"

"No, I don't mean that; but that there is any real difference between men and women in these ways—that men are all bad and women all good, and that sort of thing. One's as bad as the other, Miss Grey. When you have lived as long in the world as I have, you'll find it, I tell you. But I don't find much fault with either lot. I think they are both right enough, all things considered, don't you know?"

"I am sure Mary Blanchet is devoted to her brother," Miss Grey said warmly.

"That little old maid? Well, now, do you know, I shouldn't wonder. That's just the sort of woman to

be devoted to a brother, and, of course, he doesn't care twopence about her."

"Oh, for shame!" said Minola, not, however, feeling quite satisfied about the strength of Herbert Blanchet's affection for his sister, even while she felt bound, for Mary's sake, to utter her protest against his being set down as wholly undeserving.

"But I say," Mr. St. Paul observed, "what a fool he is! I don't think I ever saw a more conceited cad and idiot."

"He is a very particular friend of mine, Mr. St. Paul," Miss Grey began. "At least, his sister is one of my oldest friends."

"Yes, yes; just so. The good old spinster is a friend of yours, and you try to like the cad-brother on her account. All quite right, of course. I should say he was just the sort of fellow to borrow the poor old girl's money, if she had any."

"Oh, Mary has no money, and I am sure, if she had, she would be only too glad to give it to him."

"Very likely; anyhow, he would be only too glad to take it, you may be sure. But I don't want to say anything against your friends, Miss Grey, if you don't like it. Only women generally do like it, you know—and then, you may say anything you please, in your turn, against any of my friends or relatives. I shan't be offended one bit, I can assure you."

Minola had nothing to say, and therefore said nothing. Her new acquaintance did not allow any silence to spring up.

"Talking of friends," he said, "there is one of your friends who politely declines any helping hand of mine in the election business at Keeton, although I think I

could do him a good turn with some of the fellows who are out of humour with my brother. Our Quixotic young friend will have none of the help of brothers who quarrel with brothers, it seems. Easy to see that he never had a brother."

"Mr. Heron is a man of very sensitive nature, I believe," Minola said; "he will not do anything that he does not think exactly right, Mr. Money says."

"Yes, so I hear. Odd, is it not? Heron always was a confounded young fool, you know. He got into all his difficulties by bothering about things that oughtn't to have concerned him one red cent. Well, he won't have my disinterested assistance. There again he is a fool, for I could have done something for him, and Money knows it—it was partly on Money's account that I thought of taking up Heron's side of the affair, because, so far as I am concerned, anybody else would do me just as well so long as he opposed my brother's man."

"I can quite understand that Mr. Heron would not allow himself to be made a mere instrument to work out your quarrel with your brother. I think he was quite right."

The good-humoured St. Paul laughed.

"All very fine, Miss Grey, and it does for a lady uncommonly well, no doubt; but if you want to get into Parliament, it won't do to be quite so squeamish. I am sure I should be only too happy to get the help of Cain against Abel or Abel against Cain, if I could, in such a case."

"Most men would, I dare say," Minola answered, with as much severity as she could assume under the possible penalty of Mr. St. Paul's laughter. "But I am

glad that there are some men, or that there is one man, at least, who thinks there is some object in life higher than that of getting into Parliament."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I quite agree with you, Miss Grey; I shouldn't care twopence myself about a seat in Parliament—a confounded bore, I think. But if you go in for playing a game, why, you ought to play it, you know."

"But are there not rules in every game? Are there not such things as fair and unfair?"

"Of course, yes; but I fancy the strong players generally make the rules to suit their own ideas in the end. Anyhow, I never heard of any one playing at electioneering who would have hesitated for a moment about accepting the hand I offered to our Quixotic young friend."

"I am glad he is Quixotic," Minola said eagerly. "I like to think of a man who ventures to be a Quixote."

"Very sorry to hear it, Miss Grey, for I am afraid you won't like much to think about me. Yet, do you know, I came here to make a sort of Quixotic offer about this very election."

"I am glad to hear it; the more Quixotic it is, the more I shall like it. To whom is the offer to be made?—to Mr. Heron?"

"Oh, no, by Jove!—excuse me, Miss Grey—nothing of the sort. The offer is to be made to you."

"To me?" Minola was a little surprised, but she did not colour or show any surprise. She knew very well that it was not an offer of himself Mr. St. Paul was about to make, but it amused her to think of the

interpretation Mary Blanchet, if she could have been present, would at once have put on his words.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Grey, to you. I have it in my power to make you returning-officer for Keeton. Do you understand what that means?"

"I know in a sort of way what a returning-officer is; but I don't at all understand how I can do his office."

"I'll show you. You shall have the fate of Keeton as much in your hands as if you owned the whole concern—a deuced deal more, in fact, than if you owned the whole concern in days of ballot like these. I believe you do own a good many of the houses there now, don't you?"

"I hardly know; but I know that, if I do, I wish I didn't."

"Very well; just you try what you can get out of your influence over your tenants—that's all."

"Then how am I to become returning-officer for Keeton?"

"That's quite another thing. That depends on me."

"On you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"On me. Just listen." St. Paul had been seated in his favourite attitude of careless indolence in a very low chair, so low that his long legs seemed as if they stretched half-way across the room. His position, joined with an expression of self-satisfied lawlessness in his face, might have whimsically suggested a sort of resemblance to Milton's arch-fiend "stretched out huge at length," in one of his less malign humours. He now jumped up and stood on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fireplace, his slightly stooping shoulders

only seeming to make him look taller than otherwise, because they might set people wondering as to the height he would have reached if he had only stood erect and made the most of his inches. His blue eyes had quite a sparkle of excited interest in them, and his prematurely bald forehead looked oddly infantine over these eyes and that keen, fearless mouth.

"Look here, Miss Grey, it's all in your hands. You know both these fellows, don't you?"

"Both what fellows?"

"These fellows who want to get in for Keeton. You know them both. Now, which of them do you want to win?"

"What can it matter which way my wishes go—if they went any way?"

"How like a woman! how very like a woman!" and he laughed.

"What is like a woman? I know when a man says anything is like a woman he means to say that it is ridiculous."

"Well, that's true enough; that is about what we do mean in most cases. What I meant in this case was only that you would not answer my question. I put a plain direct question, to which you must have some answer to give, and you only asked me a question in return which had nothing to do with mine."

"Perhaps I have no answer to give. I may have the answer in my own mind, and yet not have it to give to any one else."

"Oh, but you may really give it to me!—in strictest confidence, I assure you; no living soul shall ever know from me. Come, Miss Grey, let me know the truth. It can't possibly do you any harm—or anybody

harm, for that matter, except the wrong man—for I take it for granted that the man you don't favour must be the wrong man."

"But I don't know that I ought to have anything to do with such a matter ——"

"Never mind these scruples; it's nothing; there's to be no treason in the business, nor any unfair play. It's only this: I couldn't get in for the borough myself, even if I tried my best, but I can send in the one of the two whom I prefer—or, in this case, whom you prefer. I can do this as certainly as anything in this uncertain world can be certain."

"But how could that be?"

"*That* it would not suit me to tell you just at present. I know a safe way, that's all. In the teeth of the ballot I can promise you that. Now, Miss Grey, who is to have the seat?"

"Are you really serious in all this, Mr. St. Paul?"

"As serious as I ever was in my life about anything—a good deal more serious, I dare say, than I often was about graver things and more important men. Now then, Miss Grey, which of these two fellows is to sit for Keeton?"

"But why do you make this offer to me?" she asked, with some hesitation. "What have I to do with it?" There was something alarming to her in his odd proposition, about which he was evidently quite serious now.

"Why do I make the offer to you? Well, because I should like to please you, because you are a sort of woman I like—a regular good girl, I think, without any nonsense or affectation about you. Now, that's the whole reason why I offer this to you. I don't care

much myself either way, except to annoy my brother, and that can be done in fifty other ways without half the trouble to me. I was inclined to draw out of the whole affair until I remembered that you knew both the fellows, and I thought you might have a wish for one of them to go in in preference to the other—they can't both go in, you see—and so I made up my mind to give you the chance of saying which it should be. Now then, Miss Grey, name your man."

He put his hands into his pockets and coolly waited for an answer. He had not the appearance of being in the least amused at her perplexity. He took the whole affair in a calm, matter-of-fact way, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Minola was perplexed. She did not see what right he could have to control the coming contest in any way, and still less what right she could have to influence him in doing so. The dilemma was one in which no previous experience could well guide her. She much wished she had Mr. Money at hand to give her a word of counsel.

"Come, Miss Grey—make up your mind—or rather, tell me what you have already made up your mind to, for I am sure you have not been waiting until now to form an opinion. Which of these two men do you want to see in Parliament?"

There did not seem any particular reason why Minola or any girl might not say in plain words which of two candidates she would rather see successful.

Mr. St. Paul appeared to understand her difficulty, for he said in an encouraging way—

"After all, you know, if you had women's rights and all that sort of thing, you would have to give your vote

for one or other of these fellows, and I dare say you would be expected to take the stump for your favourite candidate. So there really can't be any very serious objection to your telling me in confidence which of the two you want to win."

Minola could not see how there could be any objection on any moral principle she could think of just then—being in truth a little confused and puzzled—to her giving a voice to the wish she had formed about the election.

"It's not the speaking out of my wish that gives me any doubt," she said; "it is the condition under which you want me to speak. I seem to be doing something that I have no right to do; that is, Mr. St. Paul, if you are serious."

"I remember reading, long ago," he said, "some Arabian Nights' story, or something of the kind, about a king, I think it was, who was brought at night to some mysterious place and told to cut a rope there, and that something or other would happen, he did not know what or when. The thing seemed very simple, and yet he didn't quite like to do it without knowing why and how and all about it. It strikes me that you seem to be in the same sort of fix."

"So I am; just the same. Why can't you tell me what you are going to do?"

"I like that! That is my secret for the present."

"And your king—the king in your story—did he cut the rope at last?"

"I am afraid I have forgotten that; but I have no doubt he did, for he was a reasonable sort of creature, being a man, and I know that everything came right with him in the end."

"Very well; I accept the omen of your king, and I too will cut the rope without asking why. Of course I wish that Mr. Heron should be elected. He is a Liberal in politics. Why do you laugh when I say that, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Well, I didn't know that you cared much for that sort of thing; and women are generally supposed to be reactionaries all the world over, are they not? Well, anyhow, that's one reason, his being a Liberal. What next?"

"I don't know that any next is wanting. But of course I think Mr. Heron is a much cleverer man, and is likely to be much better able to get on in the House of Commons; and then he has his complaint to make against the Government——"

"Yes; and then?"

"Then, he is very much liked by people whom I like—and I like him very much myself." Minola spoke out with perfect frankness, believing that that was the best thing she could do, and not showing the least sign of embarrassment.

Mr. St. Paul laughed.

"You don't like the other fellow so well?" he said.

"I am sure he is a very good man——"

"That's enough; you need not say another word. We all can tell what a critic means when he speaks of some actor as a careful and painstaking performer. It's just the same when a woman says a man is very good. Then you pronounce for Heron?"

"I pronounce for Mr. Heron decidedly, if you call saying what I should like to happen pronouncing for any one."

"In this case it is of more effect than many other

pronunciamentos. You have elected Heron, Miss Grey, if I am not much more out in my calculations than I have been this some time. All right, I am satisfied. If you have money to throw away, just back what's-his-name?—Sheppard—heavily, and you are sure to get rid of it.”

“And you won’t tell me what all this means?”

“Not I, indeed; not likely. Good-day, Miss Grey; you have elected your friend Heron, I can tell you. Odd, isn’t it, that he should come to be elected after all by me?”

He bade her good-day again, and strode and shambled out of the room and downstairs, leaving Minola much perplexed and not quite pleased, and yet full of a secret wonder and pride at the possibility of her having helped to do Mr. Heron a service.

“I wonder what he would say if he knew of it?” she asked herself, and she could hardly think that he would be greatly delighted with the promise of such influence.

CHAPTER II.

Love and Electioneering.

THE soul of Keeton, as a local orator expressed it, was stirred to its depths by the events which succeeded. The three estates of the town, whereof we have already spoken, were alike concerned in the election. Had it never occurred, there would have been enough in the death of Mrs. Saulsbury and the rearrangement of Mr. Grey's property to keep conversation up among the middle grade of Keeton folks. But business like that would not interest the park, and of course it had no interest for the working class of the town. The election, on the contrary, was of equal concern to park, semi-detached villa, and cottage, or even garret. A contest in Keeton was an absolute novelty so far as the memory of living man could go back.

It may perhaps be said that the opinion of the class who alone concerned themselves about her affairs had been on the whole decidedly unfavourable to Minola. She had gone as a sort of rebel against legitimate authority out of Keeton, and had flung herself into the giddy vortex of London life. No one well knew what had become of her; and that with Keeton folks was another way of saying that she must have rushed upon destruction. Some persons held that she must have gone upon the stage. This idea became almost a certainty when a Keeton man, being in Lon-

don on business, brought back with him from town a play-bill announcing a new *opéra bouffe* in which one of the minor performers was named "Miss Mattie Grey." If the good Keeton man had only looked in a few other play-bills he would have no doubt found Greys in abundance—Matties, Minnies, Nellies, and such like; Grey being rather a favourite name with young ladies in the profession. But he made no such investigation, and it was at once assumed that Mattie Grey was Minola Grey in disguise—a disguise as subtle as that of the famous knight, Sir Tristram, who, when he wanted to conceal his identity from all observers and place himself beyond all possibility of detection, called himself Sir Tramtrist.

When, however, it was found that Minola was to have her father's property after all, a certain change took place in the opinion of most persons who concerned themselves about the matter. It was assumed generally that Mr. Grey was far too good and Christian a man to have left his property to a girl who could be capable of acting in an *opéra bouffe*. Then, when Miss Grey in person came to the town in the company of so distinguished a man as Mr. Money, even gossip started repentant at the sound itself had made, and began to deny that it had ever made any sound at all. Mr. Money was a sort of hero among the middle class everywhere. He was known to have fought his way up in life, and to be now very rich; and when Miss Grey came into the town in the company of Mr. Money and his daughter, the report went about forthwith that Minola Grey had got into the very best society in London, and that she was going to marry the eldest son of Mr. Money, and to be presented at Court.

Mr. Money had taken a couple of floors of the best hotel to begin with. He had brought his carriage with him—a carriage in which he was hardly ever known to take a seat when in town. He had brought a sort of retinue of servants. He went deliberately about making what Mr. St. Paul would have called “a splurge.” Mr. Money knew his Pappenheimers. He knew that he was well known to have sprung from nothing, but he also knew that the middle and lower classes of Keeton would have given him little thanks if he had tried to please them by exhibiting there a modesty becoming his modest origin. He knew well enough that the more he put on display, the more they would think of him and of his clients. Therefore he put on display like a garment—a garment to which he was little used, and in which he took no manner of delight. There was generally a little group of persons round the hotel doors at all hours of the day waiting to see Mr. Money and his friends go out or come in. At first Minola positively declined to go out at all, except at night; and the recent death of her father’s widow gave her a fair excuse for remaining quietly indoors. Lucy delighted in the whole affair, and often declared that she felt as if she had been turned into a princess. When Mr. Heron came down, he too seemed rather to enjoy it. At least, he took it all as a matter of course. The experiences of colonial days, when the ruler of a colony, however small it may be, is a person of majestic proportions in his own sphere, enabled him to take Mr. Money’s pomp quite seriously.

Meanwhile Mr. Augustus Sheppard had got his committee-rooms and his displays of various kinds, and was understood to be working hard. The election con-

test, so long looked for, had taken every one a little by surprise when it showed itself so near. It was natural that Mr. Sheppard and his friends should feel confident of the result. The retiring representative was now an old man. He had faithfully served out his time; he had always voted as his patrons wished him to do; he had never made a speech in the House of Commons; he had never indeed risen to his feet there at all, except once or twice to present a petition. The delights of a parliamentary career were, therefore, this long time beginning to pall upon him. He had been notoriously anxious to get out of Parliament. He had been sent into the House of Commons by the late duke to keep the seat warm until the present duke should come of age. But the present duke succeeded to the peerage before he came of age, and therefore never had a chance of sitting in the House of Commons. The man in possession was allowed to remain there through years and years until the present duke could be induced to return from abroad and take some interest in the political and other affairs of Keeton. His own son was yet too young for Parliament, and as the sitting member found himself getting too old, and begged for release, there was nothing better to do than to get some safe and docile person to take on him the representation of the borough for some time to come. Those who knew Keeton could recommend no one more fitting in every desirable way than Mr. Augustus Sheppard.

The time was when Mr. Sheppard would only have had to present the orders of the reigning duke to the constituency of Keeton and to take his seat in the House of Commons accordingly as if by virtue of a sovereign patent in ancient days. But times had

changed even in sleepy Keeton. The younger generation had almost forgotten their dukes, it was so long since a chief of the house had been among them. Even the women had grown comparatively indifferent to the influence of the name, seeing that it had so long been only a name for them. There had been for many years no duchesses and their lady daughters to meet at flower-shows and charitable bazaars, by the delight of whose faces, and the sound of whose feet, and the wind of whose tresses, as the poet has it, they could be made to feel happy and exalted. There once were brighter days, when the coming and going of the ladies at the Castle gave the women of Keeton a perpetual subject of talk, of thought, of hope, and of quarrel. Some of the readers of this story may perhaps have spent a little time in small towns on the banks of foreign—say of American—rivers which have a habit of freezing up as winter comes, and becoming useless for navigation—in fact, being converted from rivers into great frozen roads, until spring unlocks the flowers and the streams again. Such travellers must have noticed what an unfailing topic of conversation such a river supplies to those who dwell on its banks. How soon will it freeze this season? On what precise day was it closed to navigation last year—the year before—the year before that? In what year did it freeze soonest? Do you remember that particular year when it froze so very soon, or did not freeze for such an unprecedented length of time? That was the same year that—no, not that year; it was that other year, don't you remember? Then follow contradictions and disputes, and the elders always remember the river having been regularly in the habit of performing some feat which now it never cares to repeat. The

time of the frost melting and the river becoming really a river again is a matter just as fruitful of discussion. The stranger is often tempted to wonder what the people of that place would have to talk about at all if suddenly the river were to give up its trick of freezing, and were to remain always as fluent as our own monotonous Thames. There seems to him some reason to fear that the tongues of the people would become frozen as the river ceased to freeze.

Like the freezing and the melting of their river to those who lived on its banks, was the annual visit of the ladies of the ducal family to the womankind of Keeton in Keeton's brighter days. Girls were growing up there now who had never seen a duchess. The arrival, the length of stay, the probable time of departure, the appearances in public, whether more or less frequent than this time last year, the dresses worn by the gracious ladies, the persons spoken to by them, the persons only bowed to, the unhappy creatures who got neither speech nor salutation—it is a fact that there was a generation of women growing up in Keeton with whom these and such questions had never formed any part of the interest of their lives. They could not be expected to take much interest all at once and, as it were, by instinct in the political cause of the ducal family.

There was therefore a good deal of uncertainty about the conditions of the problem. The followers of the ducal family were some of them full of hope. The reappearance of a duke and duchess and their train might do wonders in restoring the old order of things. In Keeton petticoat influence counted for a great deal, and in other days those who had the promises of the

wives hardly thought it worth while to go through the form of asking the husbands. But now there was a new condition of the political problem even in that respect. The ballot, which had made the voter independent of the influence of his landlord or his wealthy customer, had converted the power of the petticoat into a sort of unknown quantity. There could be little doubt that the moral influence and the traditional control would still prevail with some; but he must be a rash electioneering agent who would venture to say how many votes could thus be counted on. It is a remarkable tribute to the moral greatness of an aristocracy, that the influence thus obtained in old days over the wives and daughters of Keeton was absolutely unearned by any overt acts of favour or conciliation. The later dukes and their families had always been remarkable for never making any advances towards the townspeople. None of the traders of the town, however wealthy and respectable, found themselves or their wives invited to any manner of festivity up at the ducal hall. All that the noble family ever did for the townspeople was to come at certain seasons to Keeton and allow themselves to be looked at. This was enough for the time. The illustrious ladies could be seen, and, as has been said, they did sometimes speak a word to favoured and envied persons. They were loved for being great personages, not for anything they did to win such devotion. "Love is enough," says the poet.

All these considerations, however, rendered it hard to calculate the exact chances of opposition in the borough of Keeton. Of course revolutionary opinions were growing up, old people found, there as well as elsewhere. There was a new class of Conservatives

springing up whom steady old-fashioned politicians found it not easy to distinguish from the Radicals of their younger days. On the other hand, keen-sighted persons could not fail to perceive that, whereas in their youth almost all young men had a tendency to be or to fancy themselves Radicals, it was now growing rather the fashion for immature politicians to boast themselves Tories, and to talk of a spirited foreign policy and the dangers of Cosmopolitanism. It would be hard to say how things might turn out, knowing people thought, as they shook their heads, and hoped the expected contest might not come on for some time.

Now the contest was at hand. At least, the sitting member had positively declared that he would sit no longer, and it was announced that the duke was coming to Keeton, and that Mr. Augustus Sheppard was to be the duke's candidate. No more striking proof could be given of the recent change in the political condition of Keeton, than is found in the fact that the adoption of Mr. Sheppard as a candidate by the ducal family did not even to the most devoted and sanguine followers of the great house make Mr. Sheppard's election seem by any means a matter of absolute certainty. There was a tolerably strong conviction everywhere, long before any opposition was announced, that the duke's candidate would not be allowed to walk over the course and right into the House of Commons this time. Nobody in the town would oppose the duke, very likely, but the man to oppose would come.

Now the man actually had come. Victor Heron had issued his address, and was in Keeton. His address was original; he had positively refused from the first to make any grand professions of superior

statesmanship or patriotism. He would tell Englishmen, he said, that he was seeking a seat in Parliament as a way of getting redress for a great wrong done to him, and through him to some of the principles most dear to the country. When he had fought his battle in Parliament, and won or lost, he promised that he would then place himself in the hands of his constituents and resign the seat if they desired. The whole address was frank, odd, original, and perhaps seemed a little self-conceited. The author's absorption in his subject was mistaken by many people, as will happen sometimes, for self-conceit.

Mr. Sheppard's address, on the contrary, talked only of the good old Conservative principles which had made England the envy and admiration of all surrounding states; of the local interests of Keeton and the candidate's acquaintance therewith; and of the many splendid things done for the town by the noble family who had done it the honour to have a park there.

"I don't think Heron's address reads half badly," Mr. Money said, one evening in the absence of Heron, to his two companions; "on the whole, I shouldn't wonder if it took some people, the women particularly. Anything personal, anything in the nature of a grievance, is likely to have a good effect on many people, especially where the injured personage is young, and good-looking, and plucky. I wish the women had the votes here just for this once, for I think we should stand to win if they had."

"Then, papa, do you think we shan't win now?" Lucy asked.

Minola looked up eagerly for his answer.

"Well, Lucelet, I don't like to say; I am not quite charmed with the look of things. I find there are a good many very strong Radicals grown up in this place since there was a contest here before; and Heron's not wild enough for them by half. They are a little of the red-hot-social-revolution sort of thing—the *prolétaire* business, with a dash of the brabbling atheist—the fellows who think one is not fit to live if he even admits the possibility of another world. I am afraid these fellows will hold aloof from us altogether, or even take some whim of voting against us, and they may be strong enough to turn the scale."

Minola hoped that if her friend Mr. St. Paul had really any charm by which to extort victory for Heron as he had promised he would not forget to use it in good time. But she began to have less faith, and less, in the possibility of any such feat. She was a little in the perplexed condition of some one of mediæval times, who has entered into a bargain for supernatural interference, and is not quite certain whether to wish that the compact may be really carried out or that it may prove to have been only the figment of a dream.

"I'm told we ought to have some poems done," Money went on to say. "Not merely squibs, you know, but appeals about right and justice, and the cause of oppressed humanity, and all that."

"I'm sure Minola could do some beautifully!" Lucy exclaimed, looking beseechingly towards her friend.

"Oh, no; I couldn't indeed! My appeals would be dreadfully weak; they could not rouse the spirits

of any mortal creature. Now, if we only had Mary Blanchet!"

This, it must be owned, was Minola's fun, but it gave an idea to Mr. Money.

"Tell you what," he said, "we ought to have her brother—the bard you used to call him, Lucelet."

"Oh, no, papa; indeed I never called him anything of the kind. I never did, indeed, Nola."

"Well, whatever you called him, Lucelet, we can't do better than to have him. We'll put Pegasus into harness, by Jove—a capital good use to make of him, too! I'll write to what's-his-name? — Blanchet — at once."

"But I don't think he would like it, papa; I think he would take offence at the idea of your asking him to do poems for an election. I don't think he would come."

"Oh, yes, he would come! we would make it worth his while. These young fellows give themselves airs, to make you girls admire them, that they never think of trying on with men. It would be a rather telling thing here, too, if it got about that we had brought a real poet specially down from London. I'll write at once."

This seemed rather alarming to Minola.

"I doubt whether Mr. Heron would much like it," she pleaded. "I don't know whether they are such very good friends just now—I am rather afraid."

"Oh, yes; of course they must be good friends! Heron is not to have it all his own way in everything, anyhow. He must like the idea; he shall. I'll write without telling him anything about it, and Heron

couldn't help being friendly to any fellow who came under his roof, as one might say."

No one made any further objection.

"I wish Heron had not been so confoundedly particular about St. Paul," Mr. Money went on to say in a discontented tone. "That was absurd. St. Paul's no worse than lots of other fellows, and in such a thing as this we can't afford to throw away any offer of support. We have to fight against the duke and his lot anyhow, and the help of St. Paul couldn't have done us any harm in that quarter, and it might have done us some good in others. I shouldn't wonder if St. Paul had some friends and admirers here still; and it is as likely as not that his being with us might conciliate a few of the mad Radicals. They might like him just because he is against his brother, the duke."

"But Mr. Heron would not have such help as that," Lucy said, in tones of pride.

"Oh, by Jove! if you want to carry an election—— and now, I suppose, if St. Paul has any influence at all, it will be given against us."

Minola thought of her unholy compact, and did not venture to say a word on the subject.

CHAPTER III.

An Episode.

THAT was an odd and, on the whole, a wondrous pleasant time. In all her mental trouble and perplexity Minola could not help enjoying it. It was like a great holiday—like some extravagant kind of masquerading or private theatricals. It was impossible that one's spirits could go down, or at least that they could remain long down, under such circumstances. Life was a perpetual rattle and excitement; and the company was full of mirth. Even Victor Heron himself, for all his earnestness, went on as if the whole affair were some enormous joke. Electioneering appeared to be the best sort of pastime devisable. They all sat up until the morning concocting appeals to the electors, addresses to this or that interest supposed to be affected, attacks on the opposite party—not, however, on Mr. Sheppard personally—squibs about the Tories, denunciations of the Ministry, exhortations to the women of Keeton, the mothers of Keeton, the daughters of Keeton, and every class in and about Keeton who could be regarded as in the least degree open to the impulses of national or patriotic feeling. Some of these appeals had to be prepared in the absence and without the knowledge of the candidate whom they were intended to serve. Heron was so sensitive about what he considered fair play, that he was inclined as far as he could to restrain rather unduly even the good spirits of his

chief supporters, and not to allow them to deal half as freely as they could have wished in the weapon of sarcasm and ridicule. Minola was developing quite a remarkable capacity for political satire, and Lucy Money was indefatigable at copying documents. There were meetings held day and night, and Victor sometimes made a dozen speeches in the course of a single afternoon.

Scarcely less eloquent did Mr. Money prove himself to be. He never failed when called upon to stand up anywhere and recount the misdeeds of the Ministry, and the crimes generally of the aristocracy of Britain, in language which went to the very hearts of his hearers; and he had a rough telling humour which kept his audience amused in the midst of all the horrors that his description of the country's possible ruin might have brought up before their minds. Mr. Money took the middle-aged electors immensely; but there could be little doubt that the suffrages of the women, if they had had any, would have been given freely in favour of the eloquence and the candidature of Victor Heron.

Sometimes it was delightful when a night came, after all the meetings and speech-makings were over—and it happened by strange chance that there was nothing more to do in the way of electioneering just then; for then the little party of friends would shut themselves up in their drawing-room, and chat and laugh, and sing and play on the piano, and make jokes, and discuss all manner of odd and fantastic questions, until long after prudence ought to have commended sleep. Minola sang whenever anybody asked her, although she never sang for listeners in London; and

she sang, if she could, whatever her audience wished to hear. Lucy played and sang very prettily too. Victor Heron had picked up in his colonial experiences and his wanderings about the world many sweet, wild, untutored songs of savage and semi-savage races and tribes, and he sang them with a dramatic skill and force for which none of his hearers had ever before given him credit. The little company seemed, in fact, to be entering into a condition of something like wild simplicity and frankness, when all the affectations of civilisation were let fall, and each did everything he could to the best effect, unconcerned by forms or by critics.

To Lucy in especial all this was delightful. It was not an effort to her to throw herself into the spirit of the enjoyment, as it was to Minola. To her the happiness of the present had no alloy. Over the passing hours there were no present clouds. In the whole world the two persons she most admired were Victor Heron and her father; and these two were the heroes of the occasion, seeming to have the eyes of the world on them, and to be the admired of all as orators and statesmen. To hear them address cheering crowds brought tears of pride and delight into the eyes of the kind little maid. She was glorious in their glory; their successes were hers. Then she had Minola too always with her, and they were all together, and walled off from the world into a little commonwealth of their own, and had nothing to do but to be great politicians all day, and listen to splendid speeches, and at night retire as it were into their tent, and be musical and joyous, and full of glorious hope. It was all a dream of love and pride to the gentle little Lucelet.

More than once—ah! more than twenty times—did Lucy tell Minola that her father had taken her to the House of Commons, and that she had often heard all the good speakers, and that she had never heard one who could in her estimation compare with Mr. Heron. She had heard Gladstone; “and, of course, he was very good—oh, yes, very good indeed!—but if you had heard him, Nola dear, you would say with me that he is not to be compared to Mr. Heron.” She had heard Mr. Disraeli too—“oh, yes, many times, and he was very clever!” she quite admitted that, “and he made people laugh a great deal;” and she had heard Mr. Bright, whom her papa always considered the best speaker of all—“but wait until you hear them, Nola—and you shall hear them all, darling—and you will say yourself that none of them is like Mr. Heron. I don’t know what it is, but there is something about Mr. Heron that none of them seems to have—at least, to my mind, Nola dear.”

Indeed, Nola knew well enough that there was for Lucy a charm in the eloquence of Mr. Heron which Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright would have vainly tried to rival. For herself, although she may be supposed to have been under the same influence as Lucy, she did not rate the eloquence of Mr. Heron quite so highly. The charm in her case did not work in just the same way. She listened with a certain admiration and surprise to the vivacious, earnest, and often highly impassioned speeches that Victor Heron threw off daily by the dozen, and she recognised with sincere delight the genuine freshness and force that were in them, and thought them a great deal better than she had expected to hear; but she would not have had

the least difficulty in admitting that Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright were probably much finer speakers than Mr. Heron; and, without having heard either of these orators, she was already quite prepared to consider their eloquence as higher in order than his. What concerned her far more was that she saw nothing in Victor Heron that did not compel her to hold to or to increase the opinion she had already formed of his manly and unselfish character. She had hoped in a strange, reluctant way that, while seeing so much of him as she must needs do during their stay in Keeton, she might see in him, not indeed anything to lower her opinion of his courage, and truthfulness, and manhood, but some little weaknesses or affectations which, harmless in themselves, might lower him in her mind from his place, and give her relief and rest. Yes, she had in her secret heart sometimes longed passionately and despairingly to be able thus to dethrone him from her heart, and to see him as a young man like another. She was suffering so much from the part which she had imposed on herself and was determined to play, that she would have welcomed relief even at the cost of the overturning of her idol. There were times when she almost wished she were able to hate him or to despise him, but she could do neither. The more she saw of him, the more she was compelled to see that, under that exterior of almost boyish impulsiveness and restless energy, there were only too many of the qualities which she held to be especially heroic. He was so frank and simple, and yet so clever; so full of courage, and yet so modest; so strong, and so sweet and gentle. He would not flatter Neptune for his trident, she thought, nor Jove for his power to thunder.

But there is many a man as good as Coriolanus in that, who, like Coriolanus, would brag, and bully, and be coarsely haughty; and Mr. Heron could do nothing like that. To her he seemed all kindness and frank, simple sweetness, and she could not dethrone him from his place in her heart.

Perhaps we may well ask ourselves whether the clever and sarcastic Minola was not, after all, as extravagant a hero-worshipper as little Lucelet. Is it, to say the least, not quite possible that when Lucy believed Victor Heron to be as fine a speaker as Demosthenes, she was only exaggerating his merits in one way as much as Minola was exaggerating them in another? Is it likely that he was by any means that pure and perfect hero, all strength, and truth, and nobleness, that Minola was resolved to believe him? To many of us, perhaps, if we had known him, he might have seemed a clever, agreeable, honest, but rather simple and impracticable young man, and nothing more. We might have probed his character with the most impartial and even benevolent purpose, hoping to find there our ideal type of manhood, and honestly found ourselves unable to see anything of the kind in him. But it may be, too, that Minola really did see what we failed to see, and that she had got with her love, not a dazzled sight, but *clairvoyance*. You cannot make a touchstone of every pebble. The other pebbles may do their honest best, and give their judgment, and be wrong.

This, however, we shall not be able to decide. It has already been said in favour of the impartiality of Minola's judgment that at least she had done her best to prove it a mistake, and had to ratify it against her

will. But, right or wrong, it affected her all the same. Every day that she passed in Keeton under these peculiar circumstances only added to the strength of the feelings which oppressed her, and against which she fought her fight in vain.

"I do wish this election would last for ever, Nola dear," Lucy said, with a sigh of mingled pleasure and fear. "I never liked any part of my life half so well."

- There was, it must be owned, a great deal of pleasure in it for Minola as well. The pleasure was a fearful joy, and was mixed up with very acute pain; still, the exhilaration and the delight were there. All the time there was a feeling that she was not only working with Victor Heron, but for him. It is true that the time had many bitter moments; it is true also that not for years had her spirits risen so often to so high a point.

That was, for instance, a delightful night when they all went out to the park, and rambled about there, and looked at the great mausoleum. It was near midnight when they set out, for it was well-nigh impossible for them to get any time to themselves at any earlier hour. The great gates of the park were closed long before that time; but Minola knew of a little stile at one of the boundaries of the park through which they might easily enter, and this gave quite a romantic air of trespassing and law-breaking to the whole escapade, which much enhanced its charm. The duke and his family had not come to the place, but were expected every day, and there was something rather piquant in the notion of thus trespassing on the lands of their political enemy. Mr. Money was much amused at the idea of their all being arrested as trespassers—perhaps

even as robbers—and brought before some country justice, who might take it into his head to render a service to the duke and Mr. Sheppard by committing them to prison. They were all in the highest spirits.

The night was one to inspire any heart. It was soft and warm, with a pale, poetic crescent-moon just showing itself over the park trees, and a planet of shining silver just beneath the crescent of the moon, looking like the emblem of the Ottoman done in light upon the sky. There was something fantastic, poetic, and a little uncanny about this half-moon with the planet just within the enclosure of her bow.

“Can anything be more beautiful?” Minola asked aloud, and in her heart she thought, “I ought to be very happy and very thankful. When last I was here, how lonely I was!—I had hardly a friend; and now, what good, kind friends I have, whom I love, and who, I believe, are really fond of me. How ungrateful I should be if I were to repine because I have not everything that an idle fancy makes me ask for!” The whole influence of the place, the hour, the conditions entered into her soul, and made her think life very sweet and gracious then.

They were standing near the steps of the mausoleum.

“Now,” said Lucy, “there is one thing I should so like just at this moment; it would be delightful.”

“Well, Lucelet, what is it?” her father asked. “Is it to have several hairs of the duke’s beard? Perhaps Mr. Heron will pledge himself to get them if you only ask him prettily.”

“Papa dear, what nonsense!” Lucy was not acquainted with the adventures of Sir Huon of Bordeaux.

"No; I only want Nola to sing for us just here. It would be delightful in this air and at this spot."

"Don't know that it would do Miss Grey's voice much good to be exerted at midnight in the open air, Lucelet."

"It couldn't do it any particular harm," Minola said, only too happy in her present mood to have a chance of pleasing anybody. "My voice is not good enough to get any harm. I am only afraid that you may not be able to hear me."

"We'll come close around you and make a ring, so far as our numbers will allow us," Victor said.

Minola mounted the steps of the mausoleum to get some advantage over her audience, as her voice was not strong, and they stood below, not in a ring, but in a row.

"What shall I sing?" she asked.

Of course she was only besought to sing any song she pleased; so, rather than keep them waiting and make herself appear as if she were attaching too much value to a trifle, she sang at once the first song that came into her mind. It was the story of the luckless lover of Barbara Allen.

Minola's voice was singularly fresh, pure, and sweet. It wanted strength, and would have sounded to little advantage in a concert room. It had some exquisite shades, if we may use such an expression, which would have been lost altogether in a great hall and on an ordinary audience. Minola, conscious of the lack of strength in her voice, and yet compelled by her dramatic instincts to seek for the fullest expression even when she only sang to please herself, had tried to make her singing obey her feelings and her perception of poetical

meaning by giving its fullest value to every syllable and every tone. The songs she sang seemed to have much more in them than as they were sung by any one else. New meanings and shades of meaning appeared to come out as the words came from her lips. But it required appreciative listeners to get at the genuine beauty of her singing; and the listeners must not be far away from the singer, or, no matter how appreciative, they must lose much of the effect. In the open air her voice would usually have failed to impress one; but this night the air was so pure and clear and soft, and the whole place was so silent, that the voice seemed made for the place, the hour, and the atmosphere; and the voice, indeed, became to the ears of some of the audience as if it were a part of the scene, an essential condition of its charm. As the song went on, the listeners found themselves drawn on to ascend the first step of the mausoleum, that they might not lose a syllable of the sweet, sad, old-fashioned story thus tenderly and sympathetically told.

The song was over. No one said a word directly in its praise. For a moment, indeed, there was silence.

"I wish she would not come down from the steps just yet," said Lucy. "Stay a moment, Nola dear; we shall ask you to sing something else, if you will. I do like to see her standing there," she explained to her father and Heron; "she looks like Corinne."

They asked her to sing something else, and of course she was only too glad to please them. This time she chose a little ballad of Walter Scott's, to be found in "The Pirate," of which in her young days of romance Minola used to be fond. This song she had put of her own conceit to the music of a little-known

folk-song of the border, which seemed to her to suit its spirit and words. It is the ballad which gives the betrayed lover's farewell to the "wild ferry which Hacon could brave, when the peaks of the skerry were white with the wave," and to the maid who "may look over those wild waves in vain for the skiff of her lover, he comes not again." For the broken vows, the maiden may fling them on the wild current, and the mermaiden may sing them. "New sweetness they'll give her bewildering strain; there is one who will never believe them again." If Minola had really been a betrayed lover, she could not have expressed more simply and more movingly the proud passion of a broken heart. As Lucy's face was upturned in the moonlight, Victor saw that her eyes were swimming in tears. He was greatly charmed and touched by her sensitiveness, and felt drawn to her in an unusual way. He turned his eyes away, fearing she might know that he had seen her tears.

Minola came down from the steps silently. As yet, no one had thanked her or said her songs gave pleasure; but Minola felt that she had pleased them, and that they liked her to sing, and for the time she was happy. If she could have known that her song had brought Victor Heron nearer in feeling than ever he was before to her friend Lucy, she would perhaps have felt an added although a rather melancholy pleasure in the power of her song. Certainly the sensation that passed through Victor's breast as he heard the last lines of the song, and looked on Lucy's face, and saw the sparkling tears in her eyes, was something new to him, and in itself no poor tribute to the influence of the music.

Mr. Money was the first to speak.

"Your way of singing, Miss Grey, reminds me of what I once heard a very clever man say of the reading of Shakespeare's sonnets. He said he never heard them properly read except by a man who was dying, like your friend the lover of Barbara Allen, and who could hardly speak above his breath."

"My dear papa, what a compliment to Nola!" the astonished Lucy exclaimed.

"You don't understand it, Lucelet—Miss Grey does, I am sure, and I hope Heron does, although I am not so sure in his case. It means that this poor dying poet—he was a poet, didn't I say?"

"No, indeed you didn't," said Lucy.

"Oh, yes, he was a poet. Well, this poor dying poet had to make such use of his failing voice to express all the meaning of the poems he loved above all others, that he would not allow the most delicate touch of meaning or feeling to escape in his reading. Now you begin to understand, Lucelet? Miss Grey's singing is as fine as that."

"Oh, if Nola is compared to a poet, I don't mind. But a dying poet is rather a melancholy idea, and not a bit like Nola. I always think of Nola as full of health and life, and everything bright and delightful."

"Still I quite understand what Mr. Money means, and it is a great compliment," Minola said. "There must have been something wonderful, supernatural, in hearing this dying poet recite such lines."

"People with great strong voices hardly ever think much of what can be done by mere expression," Money remarked.

"Then we ought to be glad if we have not good voices?" Minola asked.

"Well, yes; in many cases, at least. I think so. It makes you sing all the better."

"And perhaps they would sing best who had no voice at all."

"Perhaps so," said Money gravely; "I shouldn't wonder."

After this they all laughed, and the moment of sentiment was gone. But yet Victor Heron remained very silent and seemingly thoughtful. The new and strange sensation which had arisen in him from hearing Minola's voice and seeing Lucy's tear-sparkled eyes had not faded yet. It perplexed him, and yet had something delightful in it. The author of "Caleb Williams" declared that in it he would give to the world such a book that no man who had read it should ever be quite the same man again. Such a change it happens to more ordinary beings to work unconsciously in many men or women. A verse of a ballad, an air played on a harp, a chance word or two, the expression of a lip or an eye, an all unstudied attitude, shall change a whole life so that never again shall it be exactly what it was before.

"We must be getting home," said Money. "There are speeches to be made to-morrow, Heron, my good fellow—there are deputations to receive, and I own to being a man who likes to sleep."

"Just here and just now," said Victor, "the speech-making and the deputations seem rather vulgar business."

He thought so now very sincerely. A sense of the vulgarity and futility of commonplace ambitions and

struggles is one of the immemorial effects of moonlight, and music, and midnight air, and soft skies. But in Heron's case there was something more than all this which he did not yet understand.

"The things have to be got through anyhow," Mr. Money insisted, "and these young ladies will be losing altogether their beauty-sleep."

"Oh, I think the idea of going to sleep on such a night is odious, when we might be out under the stars in this delightful place!" Lucy exclaimed. "And besides, papa, the truth is that Nola and I always sit up together for ever so long after everybody else has gone, no matter what the hour may be—and so we might as well be here as anywhere else. If our beauty depends on early hours it is forfeited long since, and there's no use thinking about it now."

"I know Miss Grey is far too sensible a girl to share any such sentiments—so come with me, Miss Grey, and we shall at least set a good example."

He took Minola's arm and drew it within his own with good-humoured mastery, and led her away. Lucy and Victor had perforce to follow. They ran after Money and his companion. Minola could hear their laughter and the sound of their quick feet as they approached. Then when they came near they slackened their speed, and lagged a little behind. She could hear the sound of their voices as they talked. They spoke in low tones, but the sweet pure midnight air allowed at least the faint murmur of the tones to reach her ear as she walked quickly on, leaning on Mr. Money's arm, and trying to talk to him about the prospects of the coming election.

"If he loves her, he must tell her so now—here,"

Minola thought. "This surely is the place and the hour for a declaration of love, and he does love her—she is so very sweet and good."

She tried to make herself believe that she was very happy, and that she rejoiced to know that Lucy was loved—by him, and even that she was rather amused in a high, unconcerned way by their love-making. When they had crossed the stile of the park and passed into the streets, Victor and Lucy came up with them again, and walked by their side.

"It is done," Minola thought. "She has heard him now, and she has all her wish." Aloud she said, "I suppose you are right, Mr. Money, about the ballot—I had not thought much of that, but I am sure you must be right."

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Sheppard's offer of Surrender.

MINOLA heard no word from Lucy that night about Heron. Lucy seemed to avoid all speech on any subject that had to do with the midnight walk in the park.

— The next day brought Mr. Blanchet, very proud of having been sent for, and for the present, at least, filled with the novelty of a political contest. As Money had predicted, any objection which Heron might have to Blanchet gave way and vanished for the time, when Blanchet became in a manner a guest of his. But the poems which Blanchet was to contribute to the contest did not prove a great success. They were a little difficult to understand. When they were supposed to rouse the souls of Keeton electors on the subject of England's honour and duties, they were involved in such fantasy of thought and expression, that they would have had to be published with a glossary if they were to illuminate by a spark of meaning the mind of the acutest voter in the borough. Blanchet made, however, rather a picturesque figure on the platforms of meetings, and was useful as an attendant on the two young women when Money and Heron had to be busy elsewhere; and Mr. Money liked, for electioneering effect, the appearance of a large suite. Minola never saw the poet, except before the general company.

He had consented to come to Keeton solely because he thought it would give him more than one opportunity of speaking a word or two to her in private; and no such chance seemed ever likely to present itself there. Minola was utterly unconscious of his wish or of its purpose. She did not know that when he was invited to Keeton he went to his sister, and told her that the happy chance had come at last; and that she had kissed him with tears in her eyes, and prayed for his success. Minola was as friendly with him as possible—far more so than she seemed to be with Heron, for example; but he got no such chance of trying his fortune as his sister and he had believed to be coming.

Is there often a political election with such cross-purposes going on in the midst of it? It would almost seem as if all the persons more directly concerned were either the planners or the objects of some little side game of love. We know what thoughts and hopes were formed on Victor Heron's account by poor Lucy and her father; and Minola soon learned that the Conservative candidate had still a purpose at his heart which no lawful returning-officer could gratify. Add to this, to go no further for the present, the purpose which we know that Mr. Blanchet had in consenting to try the part of Poet Laureate to the Liberal candidate, and we shall see that the game was a little complex which all these were playing.

Minola had made a grave mistake in judging the character of her discarded lover. She thought him a hypocrite, and he was not; she thought his love for her was all a sham, and it was not. He was a slow, formal man; formal in everything—in his morals as well as

in his manners. For him the world's standard was all. He could not lift his mind above the level of the opinion of respectable people. What they said became the law of life to him. What they called proper he believed to be proper; what they condemned became in his eyes only deserving of condemnation. But he was quite sincere in this. What he came by this process to regard as wrong he would not have done himself—except under such circumstances of temptation or provocation as may ordinarily be held to excuse our human nature.

His love for Minola was very strong. It was the one genuine passion of his life. He had made up his mind that he would succeed in life, that he would become a person of importance in London, and that he would marry Minola Grey. Nor did her refusal much discourage him. After the first pang was over, he said to himself that all would come right yet; that at least she did not love any one else, and that the world would come to him who waited, as he had known it to come to himself in other ways when he waited before. He had resolved to represent Keeton in the House of Commons, and now that resolve seemed to have nearly worked out its purpose. But the night when, passing under Minola's windows, he saw Victor Heron produced a terrible reaction within him. He felt satisfied that Heron must be in love with her, and he thought with agony that such a lover was very likely indeed to fascinate such a girl. He began to pay repeated visits to London in a half secret way, and to watch the movements of Minola, and to try to find out all he could about Victor and his friends. The thought of having Heron for his rival in both ways, in love and

in ambition, was almost more than he could bear. There seemed something ominous, fateful in it. He became filled with a kind of superstitious feeling that if he lost the election he must lose all. He hated Heron with a passion that sometimes surprised himself. There appeared to him to be something wicked in this young man coming from the other side of the earth to cross him in his two great desires. His slow, formal nature worked itself up into dense consistency of hate. The election contest became a relief to him. It was like meeting his rival in battle. The fierce joy was heightened when Minola came to Keeton. To win under such conditions would be like killing his rival under her very eyes.

It was when at the very height of his hope, and when the anticipation of revenge was turning our formal moralist into a sort of moral Berserker, that a piece of news reached his ears which well-nigh changed his purpose. He was told that Victor Heron was to marry Mr. Money's daughter, and that that was the reason why Money took such interest in the contest. He was assured of this on what seemed to him good authority. In fact, the report hardly needed any authority to confirm it in his mind. What could be more probable? What could more satisfactorily explain everything? What other purpose could a man like Money have in taking all that trouble about a stranger like Heron? Mr. Sheppard trembled to think of the mistake he had nearly made.

So, then, it was not certain that Minola was lost to him, after all? A moment before, he was only thinking of revenge for an irreparable injury. Now hope sprang up again. At the bottom of Sheppard's

nature was a very large reserve of that self-confidence or self-conceit which had carried him so far on his way to success; and he was easily roused to hope again in his chances of conquering Minola's objection to him.

He became suddenly filled with an idea which, in all the thick and heat of his preparations for the contest, he determined to put to proof. By this time it should be said that he had little doubt of how the struggle would go if it were left to be a duel between him and Heron. What it cost him to take the step he is now taking will be better appreciated if this conviction of his is kept in mind.

Mr. Sheppard dressed one afternoon with even more than his usual care, but in style a little different from that which he commonly adopted. He had got a vague idea that his usual manner of dressing was rather too formal to please a girl like Minola, and that it was wanting in picturesqueness and in artistic effect. He had studied many poems and works of art lately, with much pain and patience, and tried to qualify himself for an understanding of those schools and theories of art which, as they were said to be new, and were generally out of Keeton's range, he assumed to be those of the London circles which Minola was reported to frequent. He got himself up in a velvet coat, with a tie of sage-green silk and a bronze watch-chain, and a brazen *porte-bonheur* clasping his wrist. He looked like a churchwarden masquerading as an actor. Thus attired, he set forth to pay a visit to Minola.

He had met her several times during the settlement of the business consequent on the death of Mrs.

Saulsbury. He had met Mr. Money often, and acted sometimes as the representative in business matters of Mr. Saulsbury. He had always demeaned himself on such occasions with a somewhat distant courtesy and respect, as if he wished to stand on terms of formal acquaintanceship, and nothing more. He was very anxious to get once more on such terms with Minola as would allow him to see her and speak with her now and then, without her being always on her guard against love-making. It seemed clear to him that he had better retire for a while from his former position, and try to take the attitude of one who, having been refused, has finally accepted the refusal. His manner did in fact impose upon Minola. Never having believed in the reality of his love, she found no difficulty in believing that he had easily reconciled himself to disappointment, and that he had, perhaps, his eyes turned somewhere else already. Whenever they did meet they were friendly, and Minola saw no great necessity for avoiding him, except such as might seem to be imposed upon her by the fact that her friends were on one side of the political contest, while he was on the other. Mr. Sheppard even called to see her once or twice about some of the affairs of Mr. Saulsbury, and saw her alone, and said no word that did not relate to matters of business. It was a great relief to Minola to see him and not Mr. Saulsbury, and she was even frank enough to tell him so. He only said, with a grave smile, that he feared she "really never had done justice, never had done quite justice," to the motives and the character of Mr. Saulsbury. But he admitted that Mr. Saulsbury's austere manners were a little against him.

No surprise, therefore, was created in the mind of any of our friends when one morning Mr. Sheppard's card was brought to Minola, and she was told that he wished to speak a few words with her.

Mr. Money had never heard anything about Sheppard's former attentions to Minola. He was inclined to think Sheppard a very good fellow for taking any trouble about Minola's affairs at a time when he had so much of his own to occupy him.

So Minola received Mr. Sheppard in one of the sitting-rooms of the hotel, and was not displeased to see him. She even asked if he would not like to see Mr. Money. This was after he had talked to her about the particular object of his coming—something relating to what seemed in her mind the interminable arrangements about the house property which had fallen to her share.

"I should have no objection to see Mr. Money, Miss Grey—none whatever; I hope we may be good friends, although Providence has decreed that we should be on opposite sides of this political controversy. But I am not sure whether under the circumstances it would be agreeable to all parties if I were to see Mr. Heron, or whether, not being on such terms with him, I ought to call on his friend. These are points, Miss Grey, on which you, as a lady, might not like to decide."

"Oh, I couldn't think of deciding!" Minola said hastily, for she had made her suggestion in obedience to a sudden impulse, and was not sure that she had not done something wrong; "I don't know anything about it, and perhaps I ought not to have said anything at all."

"Your suggestion, Miss Grey, was only in accordance with all the impulses of your generous nature." Mr. Sheppard still loved as much as ever his long and formal sentences. Minola could not help wondering how the House of Commons would like such a style, if Mr. Sheppard ever got a chance of displaying it there.

"You do not, I hope," he continued, "disapprove of my ambition to distinguish myself in political life? You know that I have for years cherished such an ambition; that hope still remains to me. It is not, surely, an illegitimate or unreasonable hope?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Sheppard, far from it; I am sure that I, like all your friends, shall be very glad to hear that you have been successful in your ambition—I think it ought to be the ambition of every man who has any talents."

"Thank you, Miss Grey. You do not, I observe, wish me success in this particular contest. That, I suppose, would be too much for me to expect?"

Minola only shook her head.

"I am afraid I shall only grieve you in this then," he said, dropping his eyes, "for I am certain to win, Miss Grey."

Minola thought of her unholy compact, and wished he would talk of something else, or, better still, go away.

"I am sorry you can't both win," she said good-humouredly, "then we could all be pleased, and we might say all we liked without fear of seeming unfriendly to one or the other." She could not help feeling that this speech was a little like one of Mr. Sheppard's own.

"Is it true," Mr. Sheppard asked abruptly, "what people say in Keeton—this about Mr. Heron and Miss Money?"

"I don't know much about the gossip of Keeton, Mr. Sheppard, and it would not have much interest for me—I don't like Keeton."

"It is not, perhaps, mere gossip. They say that Mr. Heron is to be married to Mr. Money's daughter; that, they say, is the reason why we in Keeton are favoured with the personal interference of Mr. Money in our local affairs."

Minola rose, and seemed as if she were resolved that the conversation must end there.

"I can't tell you anything about that, Mr. Sheppard; even if I knew anything, which I don't, I could hardly be expected to talk about it. It does not concern you or me much, I suppose."

"It concerns me greatly," he said warmly. "Of course it concerns me that a stranger should come down here to Keeton interfering in our affairs, and making discord and confusion where we are all inclined to harmony. But I tell you this, Miss Grey, and you may tell your friends so, if you like—they haven't a chance here, except through you."

Minola was amazed, and could not help looking up with an expression of curiosity. Was this to be another offer to put the decision of the contest in her hands?

"Yes," he went on, as if he had understood her thought, "it shall be in your hands if you wish it. I am very ambitious of representing my native town in Parliament; but I have an ambition twenty times stronger than that, and an older ambition too. If you

wish to see your friends succeed in this affair, declare your wish, and I will withdraw to please you. I can find a chance somewhere else! I am not likely to fail in anything I set my heart upon; and no other man but myself could carry this borough in the duke's interest at such a time as this. I can carry it, and if we two stand alone—Mr. Heron and I—I am safe to carry it; but if you only say the word, I will give up the place this moment. Think of it, Miss Grey—do give it a moment of thought. I don't want to bind you to anything; I don't put any condition; I only ask you to let me do this for *you*."

His eyes were full of eagerness, and his manner had almost lost its formalism. He did not seem to her the man she had ever known before. She felt something like respect for him.

"I could not ask you to do anything of the kind for me, Mr. Sheppard," she said gently. "Why should I? What right could I have to allow you to make any sacrifice for me? This would be a great sacrifice; and I suppose a thing a man ought not to do for any personal feeling."

"You are quite right; you had always a clearer understanding than women are supposed to have about these things—I remember your father saying so often. It would raise an outcry here against me. My own party would denounce me; I should never be looked at by any of the duke's people again. You can hardly think what a sacrifice it would be to a man like me. But that's why I offer it. I want to make some great sacrifice—I do!—to prove to you that I am sincere, and that there is nothing I would not do for you. Mind, I am not talking of making a bargain. I only

say, if you wish me to do this, it shall be done. That's all."

"I don't wish you, Mr. Sheppard; it would be most unfair and wrong of me to do so. It would be a shameful thing of me, I think, and I wish you had not thought of it, although I can't help feeling that I owe you some thanks even for the offer."

"Think of it, Miss Grey—just think a little more of it. I mean it, I assure you; I mean it all. Let him have the seat if it pleases Mr. Money and his daughter, and if you want to please them. It will be all your doing, mind! I should be glad to make Mr. Money's acquaintance more than I have done; I have no ill-will to Mr. Heron; why should I have? I am not in love with Miss Money," he added, with rather a sickly smile that it pained Minola to see.

"I don't need to think it over, Mr. Sheppard; I know already what I ought to say. I could not ask you to do such a thing for me, or allow you to do it if I could prevent you. I don't understand much about such things, but it seems to me that what you propose would be dishonourable to you. No, Mr. Sheppard; go on and fight out your fight—why should you not? We may be friends all of us just the same."

"I want to do this for you—to show you that I am sincere in all that I—all that I ever said to you."

Minola felt a colour coming on her cheeks.

"I can believe you to be sincere without such a proof as that," she said.

"But do you—do you? I could be content if I thought you did believe that. Tell me that you do believe that."

"Why should I not believe it? I have always heard you spoken of as a man of the highest character——"

"It isn't that," he said, cutting off her words abruptly; "it is not that I am speaking about. You know it is not that! I want you to tell me whether you believe that I am sincere in loving you."

"I thought we were never to speak of this again," she said, and she was moving almost in alarm towards the door. He quietly stood in her way and prevented her.

"I never said so. I told you I would not give up my hope, and I don't mean to give it up. I told you in the park here, the first day that I spoke out—I told you that I would not give up, and I will not. I love you always; I did from the time when you were a child, and I was not so very much more. I am slow sometimes, but when I get a feeling like that it never leaves me. I know you used to laugh at me and to make fun of me, but I didn't care much about that, and I don't care. It wasn't a very generous thing to do, knowing what you did about me. No, no, Minola, you shan't go yet; indeed you shan't. You must hear me now, once for all."

"If it will be once for all, Mr. Sheppard; if you will promise me that——"

"No, no! I'll promise nothing. I'll never give up this hope, I tell you fairly; never, never, Minola. Yes, you used to laugh at me, and it wasn't generous; but who expects generosity from a woman?—and in any case it couldn't change the feelings of a man like me to you—no, not if you treated me like a dog. You don't know what it is to be insanely in love with some one who does not care about you. If you did, you could make some allowance for me."

His whole manner was so strange and so wild that it compelled the attention of Minola, and almost made her afraid. She had never seen in him anything like this before. Some of his words, too, fell touchingly and painfully on her ear. Did she, then, not know what it was to be foolishly in love without hope of return? Did she not? and ought not what she knew to make her more tender towards this man, who, in so strange a way, seemed to be only in like case with herself? She ceased to fear Mr. Sheppard, or to feel her old repugnance for him. Her manner became gentle and even sweet, as she spoke to him, and tried to reason with him.

"If I ever did laugh at you, Mr. Sheppard, it was only as girls who know no better will laugh at people whom, if they only did know better, they would respect. I was wrong and silly, and I ask your pardon most sincerely. I don't think, Mr. Sheppard, I am likely to offend many people by any excess of good spirits for the future."

"You never offended me," he said eagerly; "or, if you did, it was only for the moment, and I didn't care. You were welcome to say anything you liked, and to laugh at me as much as you liked; you are still. You may laugh at me, Minola, the moment my back is turned, if you like. That won't make me love you the less, or give up trying to make you change your mind."

"Why can't we be friends, Mr. Sheppard? I could like you much, I am sure now, if you would only let me."

"No, no! we never can be friends," he said, taking up his hat, as if he felt that it would be useless to say

any more then. "We might be enemies, Minola—although I can't well think of myself as your enemy—but I'll never consent to be your friend."

"We never can be anything else then," Minola said more firmly. "I don't mean to marry; the man does not live in the world," she declared with positive energy, "whom I would marry; and I couldn't love you, Mr. Sheppard; and for heaven's sake, I beseech of you, let us not have all this to go over again and again. I wonder men can degrade themselves in such a manner—it is pitiful; it is shameful!" she added. "I would not, if I were a man, so lower myself for all the women in the world."

"There is nothing I would not lower myself to for you—nothing I would not do for you. I don't call it lowering myself; I am in love with you, and I would do anything to carry my point; and I don't give up yet. Don't let it be war to the knife between us two, Minola."

"I want no war, but only peace," she said gently. "I want to be your friend, Mr. Sheppard; I will not be your enemy even if you do persecute me."

He made no further effort to detain her, but opened the door for her, and allowed her to go without another word.

Mr. Sheppard's passion, strong as it was, did not wholly blind him. He saw that he had gained an advantage worth trying for. He saw that Minola had been impressed for the first time with a certain respect for him. This was something to have gained, and he went away with a feeling of satisfaction. He had offered to give up one great and, as he believed, almost certain chance of gratifying his ambition for her sake. He was

perfectly sincere in the offer, and he would have been wild with pride and delight if she had accepted it. Now that she had refused, he felt that the best thing he could do was to fight the battle out as she had said herself, and win it. "When I defeat her friend, she can't laugh at me then," he thought. Mr. Sheppard had not had much experience in the ways of women, nor had he studied women and courtship in romance or poetry. But he had enough at least of instinctive knowledge to understand that power and success count for more usually in the eyes of women than piteous appeal. He went home prepared again for the battle, and again longing for it.

It is quite true that Minola for her part felt a higher respect for him than she had ever known before. Her own experiences had taught and had softened her. He really was sincere; he was in love, and with her, she now felt. Perhaps a woman can never feel merely anger or scorn for one who she believes does really love her. The whole bearing of the man had seemed to be dignified by genuine emotion. His strange offer had something in it that she recognised as chivalrous in a sort of perverted way. When Minola used to read "Ivanhoe," and think over all its people as if they were living beings whom she either loved or hated, she always felt driven in despite of all propriety to feel a certain admiration for the Templar, Brian de Bois Guilbert. Especially was she struck with admiration for him when he offered to throw away career and reputation in Europe if Rebecca would love him, and go with him to seek out some new sphere of life. The memory of these readings and thinkings came oddly back upon her now.

"This poor Sheppard is a sort of Templar," she could not help thinking. "To offend the duke's people is just as great a sacrifice for him as for my old friend Bois Guilbert to throw away the chances of rising to be Grand Master of his Order. The public opinion of Keeton is as much to one hero as the voice of Europe to the other. Going to look for a new borough is as bad a thing perhaps in our days as trying for a new career among the Saracens or wherever it was. I begin to think poor Mr. Sheppard is as good a hero as any one else. He is a fool to make such an offer, and I suppose it is rather dishonourable—at least, it looks a little like that to me—but I suppose all men will twist their code of honour a little to suit themselves, and at all events it is no worse than the conduct of the Templar, and I used to admire him."

Of course in all this Minola assumed herself to be talking ironically, and in fact to be relieving her mind of many sarcasms at the expense of man. But there was a little of earnest, too, in her enforced jesting.

"Our rival must have a good deal of time to spare," Mr. Money observed when Minola saw him shortly after; "or he must be very good-natured to take so much trouble about Mr. Saulsbury's affairs. I suspect the truth is that he feels pretty sure of the result."

"Then you think we have lost?" Minola asked, dismayed.

"All except honour, I fear," he answered coolly. "I don't see much chance, Miss Grey. The extreme 'Rads' won't have anything to do with us, I am pretty sure. Your Keeton friend stands to win unless something wonderful happens."

"But will those extreme people vote for him—for Mr. Sheppard?"

"There's no knowing; you can't count upon these fellows. But even if they don't, you see it will come to about the same thing—at least, unless they all hold back in a mass, which is not at all likely. I think it will be this way: a few of them will vote for Sheppard, just because they hate no one so much as a Liberal who is not strong enough for them; and those few will be enough to give your Keeton friend the seat."

Lucy and Minola both looked rather blank at this prospect. Minola began almost to wish she had taken Sheppard at his word. Suddenly Mr. Money was called away by some political fellow-worker, who had a face which was like a title-page to some wonderful volume of news.

In a few moments Mr. Money returned full of excitement, and holding a paper in his hand.

"I say, young ladies," he exclaimed, "here's a new incident for you; something sensational, I should say. Here's our friend St. Paul coming out himself at the last moment as a candidate for Keeton in the Red Republican interest, and denouncing the duke, his brother, as if the duke were Cain and he were the ghost of Abel."

"But can he do that, papa?" asked Lucy, indignantly.

"Can he do what, Lucelet?"

"Become a candidate now, dear, at this time?"

"Why, of course he can—what should hinder him? The nomination isn't until the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, but I call it so unfair!"

"My dear little Lucelet, what do you think he cares what you call it or what anybody else calls it?"

"Then does this destroy our chances altogether?" Lucy plaintively asked. "I always thought he was a treacherous man."

"Stuff, my good little girl; there are no treacheries in politics and elections. But I must think this over a little. I am not by any means sure that it may not prove an uncommonly good thing for us, by Jove! Where's Heron? I must get at him at once; and so, young ladies, good-bye for the moment."

"Mr. Money hurried away. During the few moments he had stopped to talk to the girls several excited heads had been thrust into the room, as if entreating him to come away.

Minola, too, was not by any means sure that this new incident was not meant to turn to the account of Victor Heron. This, then, was clearly Mr. St. Paul's plot. She understood quite enough of the explanation Mr. Money had been giving to see that if any of the extreme Radical votes could be taken from Sheppard's side the chances of Heron would go up at once. She could not doubt that Mr. St. Paul knew this still better. She became full of excitement; and such is the demoralising effect of all manner of competition on human creatures, that Minola now found herself wishing that the candidate she favoured might win by Mr. St. Paul's device or that of any one else; but win somehow.

CHAPTER V.

"Mischief, thou art afoot."

NEVER was the aspect of a community more suddenly changed than that of Keeton from the moment when St. Paul flung himself into the contest. Up to that hour a grave decorum had governed even its most strenuous efforts. There was plenty of speech-making, of crowds, confusion, and noise; but everything was in decent order. There were no personal attacks; and the Liberal candidate had not allowed a great scope even to the good spirits and the humorous powers of all his followers. A somewhat elaborate courtesy had been observed between the candidates and their leading supporters on both sides. Mr. Heron had always spoken with high respect of Mr. Sheppard, who of course had not failed on his part to do justice to the personal character of his opponent. In fact, as the orators on both sides were in the habit of observing about twenty times a day, it was a contest of political principles altogether, and by no means a contest of persons.

All this was now changed. Mr. St. Paul had leaped into the arena with a vivacity which proved only too contagious. His speeches were alternations of vehement personal abuse and broad, audacious humour. Throne, altar, and caste seemed alike to be the targets of his oratory. He was the reddest of all Red Re-

publicans. He was the typical *prolétaire* of *prolétaires*. Mr. Money had denounced the Ministers and the Tories; Mr. St. Paul denounced the Ministers, the Opposition, the Tories, the Liberals, the aristocracy, and the middle-class with equal fervour. The employers of labour and the clergy of all denominations came in for rattling vituperation at his hands. He assailed the two candidates and their political professions with good-humoured contempt. He declared that if the Liberal candidate had a personal grievance which he wanted to put right in the contest, he, St. Paul, had a personal grievance of a nature far more nearly concerning the people of Keeton—a grievance against the brother who had disowned and cast him off; who had slandered him, ousted him from the affections of his father, driven him into exile; but who, thank heaven, could not intimidate him, or turn him into a crawling sycophant. He boasted that in spite of his brother, who had tried to ruin him, he had made a fortune by his own hands and his own brains in the great Free Republic, the land where there were no dukes, where all men were equal, where there was no hireling State clergy, and no trampling tyranny of employers—need he say it was the glorious republic beyond the Atlantic? He made dreadful work of the allusion in Mr. Sheppard's address to the services rendered to Keeton by the ducal family. He indignantly asked of his hearers what a duke had ever done for the town. When had a duke pressed the honest hand of a Keeton working-man? When had a duke or a duchess taken the slightest interest in the poor and virtuous working-women of Keeton? Nay, he asked, when had a Keeton tradesman—and the Keeton tradesmen had done more

to make the place than the dukes—when had a Keeton tradesman or his wife been invited inside the doors of the ducal residence? The very men who were fighting the duke's battle to-day would find themselves very lucky indeed if they got even a civil bow from the duke or the duchess to-morrow.

There was quite enough of truth in these hits to make them tell. St. Paul managed to "fetch," as he would himself have expressed it, a good many among the discontented middle-class of the place. But with the *prolétaire* he was a tremendous success. There had been some quarrel lately between the employers and the workpeople in the town, in which the latter were finally defeated, and the defeat rankled in their hearts, and they were glad of any chance of giving vent to their sense of wrong. St. Paul was, of course, all the more successful when he denounced aristocracy and caste because of his being one of the aristocracy and the ruling caste himself. He proudly declared that he had renounced his courtesy title, and that he stood on his merits as a man—a working-man who had worked with his own hands in a free land, and made a fortune there by manly energies, and brains, and strength.

One little incident made him more than ever a hero. At the second meeting he held—it was in the large room of a great public-house—there was a good deal of noisy interruption, which seemed to come from one man in especial. He was recognised at once as a person employed in some way by Mr. Sheppard: a man of great muscle and a sort of local bully. Loud cries of "Turn him out!" were raised. The disturber

bawled a defiant request to the general company to let him know who proposed to turn him out.

St. Paul paused in his flow of eloquence.

"The honourable elector wishes to know," he said, in his familiar tone of imperturbable good-humour, "who will turn him out? I can tell him at once. I'll turn him out if he interrupts again in any way. This meeting is called by me. This hall is hired by me. I beg of my friends here not to interfere in the slightest. If that honourable elector interrupts again, I will throw him down those stairs."

Amid tremendous cheering the intrepid St. Paul resumed his eloquent argument. His boisterous enemy at once began his interruption all over again. St. Paul stopped.

"Let no one interfere," he quietly said, "while I put that person out of the room."

He promptly came down from the platform, amid vociferous cheering and wild excitement.

Then followed a tumultuous scene, in which cheering, screaming, stamping, struggling, swearing, and indescribable noise of all kinds deafened every ear. A way was made for St. Paul, who advanced towards his antagonist. The latter awaited him in attitude of utter defiance. St. Paul seized him round the waist, and a furious struggle set in. It was not of long endurance, however. The local bully was well enough in Keeton "rows." He had strength enough and all the skill that Keeton quarrels could teach; but St. Paul had had the training of Eton, and Oxford, and London, and all the practice of the rugged West. He was the Gamin and the Rowdy in one. The outlawry of two hemispheres had taught him its arts of defence and offence. He

lifted the unlucky and too confident disturber clean off his feet. He carried him out through frantically-cheering ranks, and he kept his word by literally throwing him down the stairs.

Then he came back, good-humoured and cool as ever, and he went on with his speech. He was the idol of the Keeton mob from that moment forth. He was escorted that night to his hotel by a tumultuous throng of admirers, who would probably have offered to pull down the ducal hall if the rebel of the ducal family had hinted that it would give him any pleasure to see it done.

All this changed completely the character of the contest. It became fierce and turbulent on both sides. Some of the followers of Mr. Sheppard tried retaliation, very much against the prudent advice of that candidate himself. The few days remaining before the election were so furious and riotous, that Mr. Money began to think it would be best to send his daughter and Minola home to London. Mr. Heron was so much engrossed in his cause and his speeches that he hardly heeded the tumults. He had been used to rougher scenes, and these made scarcely any impression on him. It sometimes seemed to Minola that Mr. Blanchet liked the tumult less than any one; that even Lucy did not shrink from it with so much abhorrence. It was natural, she thought, that one who was at least of poetic nature, even if he were not a great poet, should shrink away from such degrading scenes. She felt her half-assumed dislike for men grow more and more into reality as she saw these specimens of the way in which they conduct their political contests.

In truth, there had been springing up in sleepy

Keeton of late years a class of whom the park knew nothing, of whom the middle-class knew little more, but which was likely to make a considerable change in the way of conducting local politics. The park and the middle-class heeded nothing, while this rough new body was growing into ideas about its own strength, its own wrongs, and its own rights. In Keeton, as in other places, people would probably have thought it wise to shut away from themselves all knowledge of unpleasant facts as long as they could; and if it had been hinted that there was a somewhat self-conceited and fierce *prolétaire* class growing up in the town during all the years while the middle-class were fawning on the dukes and duchesses, and the dukes and duchesses were languidly patronising the middle-class, the prudent persons would have preferred to hear and say no more about such unlikely and disagreeable things. The election contest first made it evident that some of the seed-grains scattered by modern socialism had been blown as far as Keeton, and had sunk into the soil there and begun to grow up into rugged stems and prickly leaves.

Minola absolutely refused to save herself by flight to London, or to believe that there could be any danger of serious disturbance. If nothing else had kept her from leaving Keeton, her curiosity would have been enough. She was intensely anxious to see what would come of St. Paul's appearance on the scene. She was almost afraid to think of the part she had innocently consented to play. She remembered now St. Paul's illustration about the king who was summoned to cut the mysterious rope, and she thought that she was really in a position very much like his. She was per-

plexed, amused, curious, a little afraid, but still anxious above all things for Victor Heron's success, and determined to see the contest out, come what might.

It was the night before the polling-day. Minola and Lucy were alone in their room. Victor Heron and Money were away speech-making somewhere. Since the appearance of St. Paul in the strife the girls had not gone to many meetings, or left the hotel after nightfall. Things were looking rather uncheerful now, and the two young women no longer regarded the whole affair as a great holiday or masquerade.

Lucy in especial was melancholy. The little weather-glass of her temperament rose and fell very readily to the changes of the atmosphere around her. The two friends were silent for a while. Lucy began at last to talk of what filled her mind.

"I wish this was all over, Nola dear; I have a horrid foreboding as if something were going to happen—something unpleasant, I mean, of course."

"This room is dull," Minola said. "Come out on the balcony, Lucy. The evening is beautiful. It is a sin to sit here and not see the sky."

The girls went into the balcony, and stood there and looked out upon the scene. The hotel stood not far from the Court-house, which Minola used to know so well in former days. The roof of the Court and the capitals of some of its white pillars could be seen from the balcony. In another direction lay the bridge, a little to the right of the girls in the balcony. The place where the hotel and the Courthouse stood was one of the few broad openings among the little maze of narrow streets which made up the town of Keeton. Minola could see the bridge plainly, and across the

bridge the dark trees of the park. A faint continuous murmur was in their ears all the time. It might perhaps be the rush of the river, a little louder of sound than was its wont; but Minola fancied it was the noise of shouting mobs somewhere—a noise to which Keeton streets, once so sleepy, were growing of late to be somewhat accustomed. This, however, was louder and longer than the sound of such popular manifestations as it usually reached the hotel. Minola, if she felt any alarm or misgiving, thought the best thing would be not to call her companion's attention to the sounds.

The night was beautiful, as Minola had said. It was yet summer, although the evenings were growing short; no breath of autumnal chilliness yet saddened the soft air.

"I wish they would come back," Lucy murmured. "I don't at all like our being left alone in this way, Nola. I feel as if we ought to be afraid. Don't you?"

"No, dear; there is nothing to be afraid of."

"Do you think so really? Ah! but it is different with you."

Lucy sighed, and Minola knew well what she would have said if she had spoken out her thoughts. She would have said, "It is so different with you; you can afford to be composed, and not alarmed, for you have not a father engaged in all this, nor a man whom you love." Minola read her thoughts, and was silent, thinking all the more herself for the silence.

"Hush, there is somebody," Lucy suddenly said, looking back into the room. "There certainly is some one there."

So there was; but it was not either of the two Lucy wished to see. It proved to be Mr. Blanchet,

who had come into the room unseen while the girls were in the balcony. Minola felt glad to see him on the whole. It was a relief from the melancholy monotony of the evening, and of poor little Lucy's bodings and fears.

Herbert Blanchet came out into the balcony in his familiar way, the way of a picturesque poet conscious of his poetry and his picturesqueness. It was a curious study, if any unconcerned observer there and then could have made the study, to notice the difference between the manner of Blanchet towards the two girls. To Lucy he was easy and even patronising, as if he would convey the idea that it was a kindness on his part to make himself agreeable to her. But to Minola he went on as if she were his acknowledged patroness and the ruler of his destiny. In good truth, however, there was not then much of a place for him in the mind of either girl.

"Where have you come from? Where is papa?" Lucy asked with eagerness.

"I have not been in the town," he said; "I was away by the river. I heard noises—shouting and all that—and I did not care to get among the fellows in their electioneering work. I have had rather more than I care for of it. My fellow-man seems a particularly offensive creature to me when he is in his political and robustious moods. I don't, as a rule, care much about Nature, but I prefer her company by far to that of such bellowing humanity as we see down yonder."

"I hope nothing has happened to papa, or to Mr. Heron?"

"Oh, nothing has happened, you may be sure!"

the poet replied coolly. "They both rather revel in that sort of thing—it seems to be their native element. It won't harm them. In my case it is different; I don't belong to the political arena; I have nothing to do with the political elevation of my fellow-man. If he is to be elevated, I am content; if not, I am content also."

"I don't know how any man can be content to stand here in a balcony talking to two girls," said Minola, "while there is so much excitement down there. I could not if I were a man."

"I will go down there if you wish," he replied with deprecating grace, "although I don't know that I could be of much use, but I don't suppose there is any real danger."

"I did not speak of danger," Minola said, rather contemptuously. "I only meant that there seemed to be some manly excitement there. There is no danger. It is not a battle, Mr. Blanchet."

"There was some talk of a row," he answered; "your friend St. Paul seems to have set the people wild somehow. But I should not think it would come to anything. Anyhow, Miss Grey, if you think I ought to be there, or that I could do any good, you have only to send me there."

"No, no, Mr. Blanchet"—Minola was recovering her good-humour—"I don't want you to go. But Miss Money was a little uneasy about her father, and perhaps we were both disappointed that you did not come bringing us some news from the seat of war. You see, they won't allow us to go to the front any more."

Meanwhile the noise grew louder and louder; it

came nearer and nearer too. There was a fury in the sound as clearly to be distinguished from the shouting to which they were well accustomed as the obstreperous clamour of boys at play is from the cry of pain or passion.

"Something bad is going on, I know," Lucy said, turning pale and looking at Minola.

Minola and Blanchet both leaned from the balcony, and could see a straggling group of women, and boys, and a few men making, as in a sort of stampede, for the neighbourhood of the hotel. They all kept looking eagerly behind them, as if something were coming that way which they feared, and yet were curious, to see. These fugitives, if they were to be called so, seemed to increase in numbers even as the watchers in the balcony looked out.

Mr. Blanchet went languidly downstairs to ask what the commotion was about, but could hear nothing more precise in the hotel than the rumour that a riot of some kind had broken out in the town, and that there were not police enough to put it down. He came back to the balcony again. For his own part, he felt no manner of curiosity. He had always supposed that there were riots at elections, and he assumed that some persons of the lower classes generally got their heads broken. There was nothing in that to interest him. It might happen even that the candidates or their friends sometimes came in for rough treatment; Mr. Blanchet would not have been very much disturbed by that in the present case. If Mr. Heron had got hurt, he would have thought that on the whole it served him right.

Minola watched eagerly from the balcony. Some

affrighted people were now running past under the windows of the hotel, for the most part women dragging their children after them. Minola called out to some, and asked what was happening; but they only answered in some inarticulate attempt at explanation, and kept on their way. Some men passed almost in as much haste, and Blanchet called to them grandly to ask what was "up." One shouted out that there was a terrible row going on in the town, got up by the "St. Paul's men," and that the military were sent for. Two of Money's servants, one his own man, were seen going out of the hotel in the direction of the increasing clamour. Lucy cried to them, and asked where they were going, and what had happened; but they only returned a respectful reassurance, something to the effect that it was nothing of any consequence, and then ran on towards the scene of the supposed disturbance, looking as if they thought it of much greater consequence than they said. The waiters and other servants of the hotel were presently seen to make preparations for closing the doors and windows.

"Things are beginning to look serious," said Blanchet, beginning to look very serious himself.

"They must not close these windows," Minola said. "I mean to stay here and see what happens. If they do close the windows, I will stay here in the balcony all the same."

"And so will I, Nola," Lucy exclaimed, looking pale, but showing no want of pluck. "Something may have happened to papa."

"I don't know that it would not be better for you ladies to go in," Blanchet gravely urged. "I think, Miss Grey, you can hardly do much good here, and

you would be quite safe indoors. Suppose you go in, and let them close these windows?"

"You don't seem to understand women's curiosity, Mr. Blanchet, if you fancy that Lucy and I could be content to be shut up while all you men were in the midst of some exciting adventure, and perhaps in most poetic danger." Minola spoke with a contempt she cared to make no effort to conceal. She thought Mr. Blanchet was selfish, and had no interest in the safety of other people. She had not yet formed the suspicion which later was forced into her mind.

Some of the servants of the hotel came to say that they believed there was a rather serious riot going on in the town, and that it would be prudent to close the windows and have the shutters put up, as it was quite possible that stones might be thrown, and might do mischief. Both the girls steadily refused to leave the balcony. Mr. Blanchet added his remonstrances, but without any effect. Minola suggested that the windows might be closed behind them as they stood on the balcony, and that Mr. Blanchet might, if he pleased, withdraw into the hotel; but she declared that Lucy and she would remain in the balcony.

"I don't believe there is a bit of real danger to us or to any one," she declared.

"But, my dear young lady," Mr. Blanchet urged, "what possible good can you do in any case by remaining on this balcony? I don't see how you could help Mr. Money and Mr. Heron, supposing them to be in any danger, by staying out there when these people evidently want us to come in."

"For a poet, Mr. Blanchet," Minola said coldly, "you do not seem to have much of the dramatic in-

instinct that helps people to understand the feelings of other people. Do you think Lucy Money could be content to hide herself in a cellar, and wait until some one kindly remembered to come and tell her how things were going with her father and—her friends?"

Minola spoke in immense scorn.

The argument was cut short. The flying crowd had been increasing every moment, and now the space before the windows of the hotel was thickly studded with people, who, having run thus far, appeared inclined to make a stand there, and see what was next to happen. The shadows were falling deeply, and it was beginning to be difficult to discern features clearly among the crowd under the windows. The clamour, the screaming, the noise of every kind had been increasing with each moment, until those in the balcony might almost have fancied that a battle of the old-fashioned kind, before the use of gunpowder, was being fought at a little distance.

In another moment a small group of persons came hurrying up to the door of the hotel in a direction opposite to that from which the clamour of strife was heard. Minola could see the uniforms of policemen among this hurrying and seemingly breathless group, and she thought she recognised one face in their midst.

The group consisted of a few policemen, wild with the haste and the excitement of their movements, and some civilians mixed up with them; and Minola soon saw that her first conjecture was right, and that they were forming a body-guard to protect Mr. Augustus Sheppard. She could now see Sheppard's face distinctly. It was pale, and full of surprise and wrath; but there did not seem much of fear about it. On the contrary,

Mr. Sheppard seemed to be a sort of prisoner among his protectors and guardians. Apparently they were forcing him away from a scene where they believed there was danger for him, and he was endeavouring to argue against them, and almost to resist their friendly pressure. All this Minola, having tolerably quick powers of observation, took in, or believed she took in, at a glance.

The policemen and some of the civilians with them were knocking at the door of the hotel, and apparently expostulating with some of the people within. At first Minola could not understand the meaning of this. Mr. Blanchet was quicker. He guessed what was going on, and by leaning as far as his long form allowed him over the balcony he was able to hear some of the words of parley.

"I say," he said drawing back his head, "this is rather too good. This fellow—what's-his-name? Sheppard—is the unpopular candidate now, and the mob is after him, and these policemen are asking the people to take him in here, and bring all the row on us. I do hope they won't do that. What do we care about the fellow? Why should we run any risks if the police themselves can't protect him?"

Mr. Blanchet was very pale.

"For shame, Mr. Blanchet!" Minola said, indignantly. "Would you leave him to be killed?"

"Oh, they won't kill him! you may be sure——"

"No, not if we can save him," Minola said. "These people shall take him in! Lucy, these rooms belong to your father now—run to them and insist on their letting him in. I'll go down myself and open the doors, and bring him in."

"They shall let him in," Lucy exclaimed, and ran downstairs. Minola was about to follow her.

"This is very generous," said Blanchet, with a sickly effort at composure, "but it is very unwise, Miss Grey. I don't know that in the absence of Mr. Money I ought to allow you to expose yourselves to such risks."

"Try if you can hinder us, Mr. Blanchet! For shame! Yes, I *am* ashamed of you. Oh, no, don't talk to me! I am sorry to find that you are a coward."

With this hard word she left him and ran downstairs. Just at this moment he heard the doors opened, in compliance with the insistence of Lucy. He heard her say with a certain firm dignity, which he had hardly expected to find in the little maid, that if any harm were done to the hotel because of Mr. Sheppard being taken in, her father would make it good to the owner. Then, in a moment, the two girls returned, doing the honours as hostesses to Mr. Sheppard.

CHAPTER VI.

All the Rivals at once.

MR. SHEPPARD made what he must have felt to be a sort of triumphal entrance. Perhaps he might have said with perfect truth, in the language appropriate to election contests, that that was the proudest moment of his life. He was almost dragged into the room by the two breathless girls, who, in the generous delight of having saved him from danger, seemed as if they could not make too much of him. He felt Minola's hand on his, as she forced him into the room. She would not let him go until she had fairly brought him into the room and closed the door behind him. For Mr. Sheppard had really resisted with some earnestness the attempt to make him prisoner for his own safety. The genial constraint of Minola's hand was a delight. There was, less perceptibly to himself, another sensation of delight in his heart also. He had for the first time in his life been in serious danger, and he knew that he had not been afraid. It is no wonder if he felt a little like a hero now.

He came in a good deal flushed, and even, if we may say so, ruffled; but he made a gallant effort to keep up his composure. The first sight he met in the room was the pale, pitiful, angry, and scowling face of the insulted Blanchet. "Are they going to embrace the fellow?" the embittered poet asked of his indignant

soul, as he saw the unpopular candidate thus led forward by the eager girls.

Blanchet fell back into a corner, not deigning to say a word of welcome to the rescued Sheppard. Mr. Sheppard, however, hardly noticed him.

"I am sorry to disturb you, ladies," he said; "and I am obliged beyond measure for your kindness. I am not afraid myself of any danger in Keeton, but the police thought some disturbance might happen, and they insisted on my going out of the streets; but I shall be able to relieve you of this intrusion in a few minutes, I feel quite certain."

"You shan't stir from this place, Mr. Sheppard, until everything is perfectly safe and quiet," Minola said. "If necessary, Lucy—Miss Money—and I will hold you prisoner until all danger is over. We are not afraid either."

At this moment there was such a renewal of the clamour that Minola could not restrain her curiosity, but having begged Mr. Sheppard to remain where he was, and not show himself, she ran into the balcony again.

The sight she saw was so turbulent, and to her so unusual, that for a second or two she could make nothing of it. She saw only a confusion of heads and faces, and whirling arms and lights, and men falling, and furious blows interchanged, and the confusion was made almost bewildering by the shouting, the screaming, and the curses and yells of triumph which seemed to her excited ears to fill all the air. At last she got to understand, as if by a kind of inspiration, that a fierce mob were trying to break into the hotel, and that the police were doing their best to defend it. The

poor police were getting the worst of it. At the same time she was aware of a certain commotion in the room behind her, which she felt somehow was occasioned by the efforts of Mr. Sheppard to get out at any risk to himself, and the attempts of Lucy and some of the servants to dissuade him. To this, however, Minola now could pay but slight attention. She felt herself growing sick and faint with horror as she saw one policeman struck down, and saw the blood streaming from his face. She could not keep from a wild cry. Suddenly her attention was drawn away even from this; for in a moment, she could not tell how, a diversion seemed to be effected in the struggle, and Minola saw that Heron and Mr. Money were in the thick of it.

Her first impulse was to spring back into the room and tell Lucy of her father's danger. Luckily, however, she had sense enough to restrain this mad impulse, and not to set Lucy wild with alarm to no possible purpose. She saw that Heron, at the head of a small, resolute body of followers, had fought his way in a moment into the very heart of the crowd, and was by the side of the policemen. He dragged to his feet the fallen policeman; he seized with vehement strength one after another of those who were pressing most fiercely on the poor fellow; she could see two or three of these in succession flung backwards in the crowd; she could see that Heron had some shining thing in his hand which she assumed to be a revolver; and she put her hands to her ears with a woman's instinctive horror of the sound which she expected to follow; and, when, no sound came, she wondered why Heron did not use his weapon and defend the police.

She could see Mr. Money engaged now in furious remonstrance and now in furious blows with some of the mob, whom he appeared to drag, and push, and drive about as if there were no such thing in the world as the possibility of harm to himself, or of his getting the worst of it. For a while the resolute energy of the attempt at rescue made by Heron and Money appeared to carry all before it; but after a moment or two the mob saw how small was the number of those who were trying to effect the diversion. As Minola came to know afterwards, Heron and Money had only heard in another part of the town that a riot was going on near the hotel, and hurried on with half a dozen friends, arriving just at a very critical moment. They came by the same way as the police and Sheppard had come, and, falling on the mob unexpectedly, made for a moment a very successful diversion. But they were soon surrounded by the rallying crowd, and Minola saw her two friends receive many savage blows, and she wondered in all her wild alarm how they seemed to make so little of them, but went on struggling, striking, knocking down, just as before. Above all she wondered why Victor Heron did not use his revolver to defend his friends and himself, not knowing, as Victor did, that the weapon was good for nothing. At least, it was good for nothing just then but inarticulate dumb show. He had not loaded it, never thinking that there was the least chance of his having to use it; and indeed, it was only by the merest chance that he happened to have it in his pocket. Such as it was, however, it had done him some service thus far; for more than one sturdy rioter had fallen back in sudden dismay, and given Victor a chance to knock

his heels from under him, when he found the muzzle of the revolver close to his forehead. This could not last long. The mob began to understand both the numbers and the weapons of their enemies. The police fought with redoubled pluck and energy for a while, but the combatants were all too crowded together to allow coolness and discipline to tell, as they might have done otherwise; and the numbers were overwhelming against our friends. Just as Minola saw Victor Heron struck with a stone on the head, and saw the red blood come streaming, she heard some one beside her in the balcony.

"Go back, Lucy," she cried; "go back!—this is no place for you."

"Is it a place for you, Miss Grey?" a melancholy voice asked. "It is not Lucy; it is I. You said I was a coward, Miss Grey; I'll show you that you have wronged me."

The poet, for all his excitement, was as grandly theatric as was his wont. He looked calmly over the exciting scene, and tried to keep his lips from quivering at its decidedly unpleasant aspect. That fierce, savage, unromantic, and even vulgar struggle was in truth a hideous whirlpool for a picturesque poet to plunge into. Yet was Mr. Blanchet's mind made up.

"Oh, Mr. Blanchet, they will be killed!"

"Who?—who?" the poet cried, peering wildly down into the horrible mob-cauldron below.

"Oh, don't you see?—Mr. Heron, Mr. Heron—and Lucy's father! Oh, merciful heaven, he is down—they will kill him!"

"I'll save him," the poet wildly exclaimed; "I'll save him, Miss Grey, or perish with him!" He was

armed with a poker, which he flourished madly round his head.

Even at that moment Minola was startled to see Blanchet preparing to scramble over the balcony, and fling himself that way into the thick of the fight.

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried to him; "you will be killed."

He smiled back a wild smile.

"At least you shall say I am no coward, he exclaimed; and in another moment he had scrambled over the balcony and dropped himself, floundering, poker in hand, on the moving mass of heads below.

At any other moment Minola might have thought of the prayer in "Firmilian" for a poet to be sent down from above, and the unexpected and literal manner in which the prayer is answered. At any other moment, perhaps, she might have found it hard to restrain her laughter at the manner in which Mr. Blanchet came crashing down on the heads of some of the combatants, and the consternation which his descent created among them. At his first coming down he carried a dozen or so of combatants tumbling on the ground along with him, and Minola in her Rebecca-post of observation could see nothing but a confused mass of struggling legs and arms. But Mr. Blanchet somehow scrambled to his feet again, and he laid about him with his poker in such insane fashion, and with such advantage of long arms, that his single and wholly untutored prowess did really for the moment effect an unexpected diversion in favour of those he came to rescue. In a moment Minola saw Victor Heron on his feet again; and she saw him amid all the thick of the affray give Blanchet an encouraging

and grateful clap on the back; and then she thought she saw Blanchet down again; and then confusion inextricable seemed to swallow up all.

All this, it will be understood, occupied but a few minutes. Suddenly the trampling of horses was heard, and a cry was raised that the cavalry were coming.

"Oh, thank God!" Minola said to herself and to the night air; "if it be not too late."

It was not the cavalry, however, but an interposition which at the moment proved as effective. Minola saw some men on horses gallop into the thick of the crowd, forcing their way as if human beings were not liable to any inconvenient consequences from having the hoofs of horses plunging among them. Wild and maddened as it was, the mob had to pay some little attention to these new-comers. One of them, who led the way, kept shouting in strident and occasionally shrilly tones a command to all who heard him to disperse and "stop the row." His voice and his presence were recognised in another moment, and the nearest rioters set up a tremendous cheer for him, which others caught up and renewed again and again, until Minola might have thought that the whole business in which they were engaged was to hurrah for the new-comer. Men actually in hand-to-hand fight with some policeman or other representative of the cause of order gave up for the moment defence or offence, and let the antagonist hammer away as he thought fit, while they cheered for their favourite. Minola had recognised him already. There was no mistaking the bald head, the bold blue eyes, the stooping shoulders, the general air of reckless bravado and good-humour. She could see his face and head plainly, for he carried his hat in his

hand and waved it gallantly at every cheer of the crowd. He forced a way right up to the door of the hotel where the thick of the struggle was, and in passing under the balcony he looked up and saw Minola, and made her a courteous bow. There was some further scuffling, clamour, and altercation; but Minola could see that the influence of the popular candidate was all-prevailing, and that the battle was over. In a few seconds the crowd began to melt away. The air was rent with shouts of civil strife no longer, but with repeated cheers for the hero of the night. The police made some futile efforts to retain a few prisoners; but not much seemed to come of that. Minola was rejoiced to hear the voice of Mr. Money say, in its usual tones of blunt self-possession—

“Never mind, officers; you know the names of some of the fellows; you can see to them to-morrow; better look after yourselves just now. Where’s the poor fellow who was hurt?”

In another moment or two Minola found herself out of the balcony, and trying to make a way into the room which she had quitted, and which seemed now a general resort. First she saw Lucy throwing her arms round her father’s neck. Then some shifting figure intervened, and she saw no more of Lucy, but was aware of Victor Heron and Mr. Sheppard exchanging friendly words. The room was full of people. She could hear various voices declaring that their owners were not in the least hurt; but she could see that Victor Heron had the mark of a large cut on the forehead, and that some one was tying Money’s arm in a sling.

“Oh, I’m all right!” she heard Victor say; “no-

thing much happened to me; Money came off much worse. But that poor policeman—I am greatly afraid he was badly hurt.”

“Never saw such scoundrels,” Money observed; “by Jove, Heron, I thought at one time that your grievance was about to be settled for ever. It was all that confounded St. Paul’s doings.”

At this moment Minola saw the intrepid St. Paul himself enter the room. She, standing with her back to the window, saw him before any one else did.

Mr. St. Paul pushed his way with his easy and indolent hardihood.

“I have come to offer an apology to the ladies,” he said, while every one turned round amazed at the sound of his voice, and he stood meeting with cheery composure the gaze of all the eyes, and all their various expressions. “I wish to offer an apology to the ladies, who, I am sorry to hear, were alarmed by the violence of some of my supporters—of course by no encouragement of mine, as every gentleman here will understand. But I am very sorry to hear that Miss Money and Miss Grey were alarmed by the little row, and I’ve come to offer them the assurance of my regret.”

Victor Heron broke from those around him, and went up to St. Paul.

“Mr. St. Paul, I hold you responsible for the whole of what has happened to-night,” he said. “You set your blackguards on to disturb this town, and if any harm comes of it—if that poor policeman who has been hurt should come to any grief—you shall be accountable for it. I promise you that you shall.”

“We are all rather confused to-night,” St. Paul coolly replied, “and we are in a humour for making

rather sweeping assertions. I am sorry you got hurt, Heron, on my honour; but there's no use in making a fuss about these things. I tell you what, my good fellow, you owe it to me altogether that you have not had your brains knocked out."

"Your gang of hired bravoos were capable of anything in the way of crime," Heron said; "but if they hadn't been twenty to one we shouldn't have wanted the intervention of their employer. Thank God, I put my mark on some of them!"

"Dare say you did—that's the way with all you peaceful fellows. I'm glad I came in time, however; and it's no use our losing our tempers about the whole affair. It wasn't much of a row, after all."

"Let me tell you, Mr. St. Paul," Money said, coming to the rescue, "that if you think you can carry things off in this way you are confoundedly mistaken. You know as well as I do that you will never be allowed to hold a seat got by such flagrant and such—such infernal intimidation."

"You may rely upon it, Mr. St. Paul," Mr. Sheppard said, likewise interfering in the dispute, "that neither Mr. Heron nor I will allow the proceedings of this night to go without a full judicial inquiry. Violence, sir, shall never be allowed to triumph in the parliamentary elections of this ancient and honourable borough."

"Bravo, Sheppard; that's very well said, indeed," the incorrigible St. Paul observed. "You have evidently been preparing for the place of its representative. But wouldn't it be as well, gentlemen, to wait until the close of the poll before we go into all this? I have, of course, all the confidence which a good cause and

the support of the people must give a man; but in such a borough there are unfortunately other influences at work, as our friend Sheppard knows, and it is just possible that I may not be elected. For the present I only came to offer to the ladies the expression of my sincere regret that they should have been annoyed or alarmed in any way. I don't see Miss Money present; but I am happy enough to see Miss Grey, and I hope she will allow me to offer my apologies for what was, however, no fault of mine."

Minola had kept near her window all this time, and was in hope of escaping without notice. But Mr. St. Paul coolly made his way to her, pushing all intervening persons aside, as if they hardly counted for anything in his progress.

"I hope you don't think all this absurd affair was my personal doing," he said, when he was close to her.

"I hope it was not your doing," Minola replied emphatically; "I should think it disgraceful for any one to have caused so much disturbance and done so much harm."

"Hadn't a thing to do with it, I give you my word. But don't you mind these fools—lucky for some of them that I came in time."

"It was disgraceful," said Minola; "a poor man was very much hurt, I am told."

"It was not a very big row, after all," he observed calmly; "I have seen twenty bigger, about which there wasn't half the talk. Anyhow, you'll find I have kept my word, Miss Grey; your man stands to win."

He made her a polite bow, took in the company generally in a friendly salute, and left the room with

the same entirely self-satisfied good-humour which he had brought in with him.

Minola felt that in a manner the eyes of the world were on her. She went up to Mr. Money, passing Victor Heron on her way.

"Where is Lucy, Mr. Money?" she asked.

"Oh, we sent her out of the room! I really thought I saw you going with her. She got frightened when she saw that Heron—and myself, I suppose, were a little hurt. She is very nervous, and she seemed like fainting."

"I'll go to her," Minola said.

She was hastily leaving the room, when Victor Heron stopped her. He seemed greatly annoyed at something.

"What was that fellow saying to you, Miss Grey? I advised you before not to let that man talk to you so much. You are too young; you don't understand; but I do wish you would not encourage him. He seems to go on as if he were a personal friend of yours. Don't let him, Miss Grey—do have sense and take my advice."

Minola thanked him with a grave and perplexing politeness, and made haste to follow Lucy. While she was speaking to, or rather listening to, Heron, the eyes of Mr. Sheppard had been on them, even as the eyes of Heron had been on her while she spoke to Mr. St. Paul. Sheppard saw that her manner to Heron was cool and indifferent, and he was glad once more.

Victor Heron turned away disappointed. As Minola was leaving the room, she heard him ask—

"Where's Blanchet? Has any one seen Blanchet? I saw him last in the thick of the fight—he came to

my help in good time, and I hope he isn't hurt. Look for Blanchet, somebody!"

A pang went through Minola's heart. She thought that if any harm had befallen the poet it might have been her bitter words which drove him in the way of it. "And I was quite unjust to him, and he is no coward," she said to herself remorsefully.

CHAPTER VII.

Victor—Propositi?

THE election was over. All the principal persons with whom we are concerned had come back to town. Keeton had nearly relapsed, for the time at least, into its ordinary condition. The riot, noisy and alarming as it was, had cost no life, not even that of the poor policeman who seemed most in danger. No doubt the seeds of a popular discontent were sown pretty broadly in the place, which will bear thorny growth some future day; but Keeton just now seems only the sleeper for the reaction after its unwonted excitement. The persons of this story who were concerned in the election might be said to be in somewhat similar condition. They seemed much the same as before; but the days in Keeton had sown some seeds for them, too, which will probably grow into influence on all their lives.

Lady Limpenny paid a visit to Mrs. Money. She had not seen her friends in Victoria Street since the election, and she was in great curiosity to hear something about it, and about some rumours indirectly connected with it, which had reached her ears. She went early, in order that she might find Mrs. Money alone.

Mrs. Money might be described as alone, so far as visitors were concerned. Only her younger daughter was with her. Lucy was looking very pretty, but pale; and she had a certain restlessness of manner and quick

brilliancy of eyes which Lady Limpenny observed, although usually a woman rather imaginative than actually observant. Lady Limpenny smiled and nodded to herself, as it might seem; after the fashion of one who congratulates herself on having judged correctly, and who says to her own soul, "Exactly; it is just as I thought it would be." But the smile and nod might be taken as partly intended for the general company in this case. Lady Limpenny appeared as if she were willing that Mrs. Money and her daughter should be taken, in an unacknowledged and modest way, into the confidence of her self-congratulations.

Mrs. Money went eagerly forward to welcome her old friend, and was cordially glad to see her, as, indeed, she was usually glad to see most persons. Lucy, as we know, did not greatly care for Lady Limpenny. She had now to submit to a peculiarly tender embrace, which she did with a particularly bad grace, looking all the time away from Lady Limpenny, even while she submitted to be kissed by her. Then she withdrew to a little sofa of her own, and was heard to express a wish that Nola Grey would come soon. On hearing this utterance Lady Limpenny looked round at her, and smiled and nodded again more benignly than ever.

"And so our dear friend Heron is in Parliament," Lady Limpenny said, in her soft, thunderous voice. "He is actually an M.P.! I am so glad; and you have all had such delightful adventures! Your names in the papers! I read it all with such envy. Yes; I always longed to be in an adventure and to have my name in the papers. I tried to get Sir James to listen to it, but he does not care for these things. You were all

near being killed! And our friend, the handsome poet—now, do tell me again what his name is—he was lost, and actually supposed to be killed, or taken prisoner, or assaulted, or something of the kind. How delightful! I should so like to have been with you.”

“Oh! Mr. Blanchet was not much hurt,” Lucy said in a rather scornful tone. “He only got into the fight somehow; I don’t know, I’m sure, what brought him there; and then he went away to London. I think something must have offended him.”

Lucy had seen, and had not forgotten or forgiven, the poet’s conduct when Mr. Sheppard was brought to the hotel during the riot, and she had not seen his subsequent dash into the strife, and paid but little attention to what was told her about it. But in any case poor Blanchet had long ceased to be a hero of hers. There was a time when he was her idol, and when she tried to believe in all manner of quaint artistic theories because they were his; and when, if he had expressed an æsthetic opinion that a lady ought to wear a coalscuttle on her head, Lucy would have fought hard to get her mother’s permission to mount the article. It is strange, as the once popular song used to say, how a woman can think the man a bore she thought a god before. At least, it is strange, perhaps, that she should make the change so soon; or, if it be contended that even that is not strange, it will surely be admitted that it is strange she could not contrive or attempt to make the change a little less glaringly apparent. One might have thought that this good little Lucy had already forgotten that she ever looked to Mr. Blanchet with wonder and admiration.

“Mr. Heron says that Mr. Blanchet was in great

danger, Lucy, my dear," her mother interposed in remonstrance; "and Minola Grey speaks very highly of his conduct all the time."

"But why did he disappear in that abrupt sort of way? why didn't he tell any one where he was going?" the pertinacious Lucy kept on. "We were all alarmed about him, and all for nothing; and we had quite enough to think about without that."

"But, my dearest darling Lucy, don't you look on a poet as different from ordinary people? I am sure *I* do. I should not like to think of our dear friend—now, *do* tell me again what *is* his name—I shouldn't like to think of his acting just as every one else would do. Oh, no; I like a poet to be a poet. I am so passionately fond of poetry; and I have had to give it all up of late. I dare not read a poem now."

"For your soul's sake, Lady Limpenny?" the irreverent Lucy asked saucily.

"Darling, yes. For my soul's sake, as you say. I was forgetting all my higher duties in life, and all that I owe, dearest, to the future life, in my love for the poetry of that delightful writer—oh, now what *was* his name?—who wrote that lovely poem in the winter that everybody was talking about. My dear, the doctrines taught in that poem were something awful—I do assure you, awful. No one could read them long and be assured of safety in the higher sphere."

"I think I remember the book," Mrs. Money said; "I think you lent it to me, Laura; but it did not strike me as containing any doctrines of a dangerous kind. It did, indeed, protest in powerful accents against the system under which this country is rushing to her destruction."

"I dare not read it, dearest Theresa—I dare not, indeed; it would unhinge my mind. But I dare not read any poems now."

Lady Limpenny presently rose to go; but she paused even in the act of making her adieux, and, taking Lucy's hand in a manner of the tenderest affection, she asked:

"But now, darling, what is this I hear about you? Is it true, this very delightful piece of news—at least, delightful if it *is* true? Do tell me, dearest; it can't be always kept a secret, you know."

Lucy tried to get her hand away; the unconscious Lady Limpenny retained it as if she were a privileged lover. Lucy could only look away and try to keep as composed as possible.

"Really, I don't know what you mean, Lady Limpenny. I don't know what the news is; and so I don't know whether it is delightful or not."

"You very, very naughty, sly little thing! So you won't tell even such an old friend? Well, your mamma won't be so naughty, I am sure. I'll come in and talk to her to-morrow or next day, when I am quite sure that you are not here. Oh, indeed, I will! I am sure now it *is* true; and I offer you my congratulations."

Mrs. Money seemed as if she would try to interpose some protest against Lady Limpenny's conclusions; but there was no possibility of stopping that lady, or of correcting any apprehensions she might have formed. She gathered her skirts about her and was gone, chattering all the time, before any one could put in a word of explanation, and firmly convinced that she knew all the truth about everything, and that her way of exhibiting it must have been delightful to everybody.

Her display of knowledge was certainly not pleasing to Lucy Money in this instance. She seemed greatly annoyed, and, when Lady Limpenny had gone, she left the room and hid herself away somewhere. Mr. Money came home almost immediately, and his wife took the opportunity of expressing some of her fears to him about Lady Limpenny's talk and Lucy's way of taking it.

"She's quite put out by it, Money dear, I do assure you. I never saw her so much hurt by anything of the kind before."

"I wish that silly old Laura Limpenny didn't talk in that way," Money said, with more earnestness in his manner than the talk of Lady Limpenny might have seemed to be worth. "It annoys Lucy, of course; and then, what she said here she will say in half a dozen places before the day is over."

"But, Money dear, it can't always be kept a secret. These things always do get talked about. I really don't see what harm it does even if they were."

"No, perhaps not; in an ordinary case, perhaps not. But somehow I don't like it in this case. I wish nothing had been said. Do you think Lucelet is quite happy, Theresa?"

"Surely, dear, I should think so—oh, yes, she must be happy, very happy. Of course it is a trial—all girls feel it so, especially when they are brought up so much at home."

Mr. Money seemed unusually grave. He stood and beat time on his chin with his fingers.

"I don't know," he said, "somehow; but I think everything is not quite right with the little girl. She

is fond of him?" he asked, turning abruptly to his wife.

"Oh, yes, dear—she adores him."

"Yes? You think so? Well, I am sure I think so too; I was quite certain of it. Of course she is young, and girls often don't know their own minds a bit—no, confound it, nor boys either, for that matter. I think at one time she used to be fond of that fellow Blanchet; and now she does not care twopence about him. I say, Theresa, if this should be the same sort of thing?"

"But, my dear, it isn't; you may be quite sure of that. I can tell you that for certain. Why, only look at her eyes when he is near! and Lucy has told me again and again that she never thought about Mr. Blanchet in that sort of way."

"Yes, I have watched her, Theresa, as you say, and I have looked at her eyes and all that; and I did believe, certainly, that it was quite a different thing this time. If I hadn't thought it—my good heavens!—should I have meddled or made in the affair?"

Mr. Money walked uneasily up and down the room once or twice. His wife looked at him anxiously, but she did not quite follow his meaning or appreciate his alarms: she was indeed, at the moment, engaged in thinking whether something could not be done to make the life of poor Mr. Blanchet a little more happy than it seemed at present to be. She was convinced in her heart that Blanchet must be suffering keenly on account of Lucy, and, as the helper of unhappy men, she burned with a wish to do something for him. She had so completely made up her mind that Lucy was having all her desire in life, and, having it, must be satis-

fied, that all her anxiety on her daughter's behalf seemed to have come to an end, and her cares properly reverted to the outer world.

"Yes, I thought it was all right." Mr. Money suddenly came to a stop in his walk. "I had not the least idea that it was not all right; but then one doesn't know—at least, *I* don't—whether it isn't a peculiarity of girls that when you get for them what they want, then, by Jove, they don't want it any more; and I tell you, Theresa, I have been thinking of this a good deal lately—in the last few days."

There are, perhaps, women who might have been disposed to remark to Mr. Money that anyhow the affair was pretty well all his own doing. There are women who possibly would have given him no better comfort than the reminder that they had not advised him to do the things he had done; and that, perhaps, if he had sought the advice of his wife a little more, the result might have been more satisfactory. Mrs. Money had no ideas of the kind. Even if she had known more clearly than she did the meaning of his alarm, it would never have occurred to her to doubt that he had done the very best thing possible under any given circumstances. If things went wrong after that, it must be the fault of the things; it could not be the fault of Mr. Money.

The talk was interrupted for the present by the arrival of visitors, for this was one of Mrs. Money's days of reception. Presently Lucy herself returned. Mr. Money drew her aside, and asked her one or two casual questions. Then he said suddenly, and fixing his eyes on his daughter, without giving her any time to think of herself or to conceal her feelings:

“Isn’t Victor coming here to-day, Lucelet?”

The eyes of the girl sparkled again as she answered, and his eyes watched her answer:

“Oh, yes, papa dear; I expect him every moment; you don’t think he is not coming, do you?”

The smile that sometimes made Mr. Money’s rough face look almost handsome came over it as he saw the expression in his daughter’s eyes. He took Lucy playfully by the chin.

“I should think he was coming indeed, Lucelet; I rather think you know more about his movements than I do. So Laura Limpenny has been talking her nonsense!”

Lucy coloured.

“Oh, yes, papa dear. I wish that dreadful woman did not come here; she talks of such things; it is humiliating to hear oneself talked about in that way.”

“Oh, that’s all, is it? don’t you mind her talk, Lucelet; it can’t be helped, anyhow; and remember that if you were a princess all the gossips of Europe would be talking about you.”

Then he left his daughter and went to talk to some one else, somewhat relieved in his mind for the moment. He watched his Lucelet, however, all the time.

Presently he saw her eyes light up and her cheeks colour, and then her eyes droop again; and she looked wonderfully pretty, he thought,—and so, indeed, might any one else have thought as well who happened to see her just then. If any one of us looking on might have admired the expression on the pretty girl’s crimsoning face, what admiration must he have felt for whom that brightening colour came and those eyes sparkled? —the king for whom—as Lady Castlewood so prettily

said—that red flag was displayed? For Mr. Money knew, before he had seen any new-comer enter the room, that the visitor whose coming caused all that brightness was the member for the borough of Keeton. Victor Heron had entered the room, and was already talking to Lucy.

Victor, then, had won everything for which he strove, and something too for which he had not striven. He had won a brilliant and an unexpected victory. Never before in the memory of man had the borough of Keeton been represented by a Liberal. There was nothing else of any particular interest going on in politics, and the attention of the country had really been turned for some days very keenly on Keeton. The riot, the family quarrel, the fact that Heron had to fight against family influences, Tory influences, and the red republicans all at once, had made his enterprise seem so dashing that, even if he had lost, he would have got a certain repute by it. But, when it was found that he had positively won, he became the hero of the hour with the public, while with his own party he was a person to be made the very most of, and applauded to the echo. No fear of his not finding men of mark to take up his grievance now.

The adventurous St. Paul had kept his word. Nothing but his intervention could possibly have carried the place for Victor, or kept poor Sheppard out of Parliament. Coming just at the right moment, St. Paul had caught the affections of the fierce democrats, the proletariat with the dash of atheist in it, and had drawn the voters away from Sheppard. Many of them had determined to give their votes rather for the man whom they called their outspoken enemy—the Tory,

that is to say—than for the doubtful friend, as every professing Liberal seemed to them to be who could not go all the way with the social revolution and them. St. Paul captivated enough of them to leave Sheppard solely to the support of the thorough Tories, who had no grievance against the ducal family; and the result was that Victor Heron won the election, or had it thus won for him without his knowledge or consent. Not the faintest suspicion of “a put-up thing” existed in any mind. It was perfectly well known in Keeton and elsewhere that Victor Heron had positively refused to have anything to do with St. Paul, and that they had all but quarrelled; and, indeed, the general opinion was that St. Paul had undertaken his candidature for the sake of spoiling Victor’s chance. He fancied, people thought, that the extreme “rads” or “reds” might give their votes to Victor for lack of any stronger Liberal, and he therefore cut in between merely for the sake of destroying the game of the man who would not accept his assistance. A great many people were amused at his folly and his odd miscalculation; and even Money wondered how he could have been so badly advised, and how he could have failed to see that in what he did he was playing Victor’s game and not spoiling it.

Victor Heron, then, has won, and is on the high road to be a political and a social success, and to have his grievance set right now, if he cares about it or has time to think about it any more. It is said that he is to be married to Mr. Money’s pretty daughter, who will have a great fortune, people are certain; to say nothing of the fact that Money has no son, and that at his death most of his property will probably go to his rising son-in-law. Truly does young Heron

seem to many persons a man who has dropped from the clouds to fall into fortune. A disappointed politician of sixty who started with splendid self-conceit, good abilities, and very fair chances, and with all has come to nothing, draws the moral of his personal failure from the story he hears of Victor Heron's success. "You see, he can do what I never could do," he says; "he can entertain the party. I defy any man to make his way in political life in a country like this if he has not the means to entertain his party, and this fellow will be able to do that with the girl's fortune and what Money must leave him some time."

It is true, then, what the people say—what Lady Limpenny has been so broadly hinting at? It was, then, as Minola Grey supposed? See, she herself has just come in, and is talking with Mr. Money now. She seems full of spirits; at least, she is talking in a very animated way. A lady who is present has already remarked, in a low tone, to another lady, that she thinks Miss Grey talks too much, and is too sarcastic for a young person. Was it as Minola supposed, and did the influence of the moonlight and the walk home *that* night in the park at Keeton prove too much for the inflammable heart of Victor Heron? No; that night had passed over, and although Heron had felt the influence of the place, the hour, and the circumstances, he had not been able to understand his own feeling clearly enough to give them expression in words or in acts. It was when he came in fresh from the excitement of the Keeton riot, and when he saw that Lucy, who with all her love for her father had borne up gallantly against the sight of his hurts, became faint the moment she caught a glimpse of

Heron's wounded face, and had to be taken from the room—it was then that the truth was borne in upon Heron for the first time, and he was made aware that Lucy Money loved him. He was almost overwhelmed by the discovery. This was something of which he had never thought. It was all true what he had said to Minola Grey that long-past day in Regent's Park—he had really had a sort of goddess theory about women. He had lived so much out of the world of fashion, and of what we call life, that he had no chance of having his ideal destroyed. If the few Englishwomen whom he met in a far colony—the wives and daughters of elderly, experienced officials, and such like—were not all that his fancy painted womanhood, he had always the conviction to fall back upon that these were no fair illustrations of the maids or the matrons of merry England at home. He had always thought of a woman as a being whom a man courted and served, and at last, by immense exercise of devotion and merit of all kinds, persuaded to listen while he told her of his deep and reverent love. It had not occurred to him to think that sometimes, even among the maids of merry England, the woman makes the love, and the man only puts up with it. When it flashed upon his mind that Lucy Money loved him, he was like one to whom some wholly new and unexpected conditions of life have suddenly revealed themselves. He felt, in a strange sort of way, stricken humble by the thought that so sweet and good a girl could love him, and wish to trust her life into his hands. Is it any wonder if, in the flush of his shame and his gratitude, he told himself that he was in love with her?

CHAPTER VIII.

“Luckless Love’s Interpreter.”

THE event in which so much success had fallen to the share of Victor Heron had not, on the whole, turned out badly for his rival, Mr. Sheppard. The latter had lost the election, it is true, but he had made a certain repute for himself as a Conservative candidate. He was now before the eyes of his party and the country as one who had fought a good fight, who had made sacrifices for his cause, and who therefore ought to be considered when another vacancy brought an opportunity of choosing and supporting a candidate. Mr. Sheppard’s name was in the political playbill, and that was something. After the defeat of Novara, Count Cavour, then only a rising politician, remarked that Piedmont had gained enough to compensate for all her losses in having got the right to hoist the national flag. Mr. Sheppard had got by his defeat the right to hoist the flag of his party, to be one of its bearers, and that was something. He was now looked upon everywhere as a man sure to be seen in Parliament before long.

Mr. Sheppard made arrangements for the carrying on of his business by other hands than his, and he came to live in London. He took handsome lodgings in a western street, not far from where Victor Heron lived. He was elected a member of a new Conser-

vative club, and apparently he went about the task of getting into society, at least into the political dinner-parties and crowded drawing-rooms of society. In that which he had set out to himself as the great object of his life he was not, as we have seen, by any means despondent. He saw that he had greatly risen in the good opinion of Minola Grey. She had never been so kind and respectful to him as during the contest at Keeton. Always before she had treated him with contempt, which she took no trouble to hide; then, for the first time, she had shown some respect and even regard for him. He settled himself in London, a hopeful and almost a confident man as regarded alike his ambition and his love. He could afford to wait, he said to himself. He cultivated as much as possible the acquaintanceship of Mr. Money and of Victor Heron, whom, it is needless to say, he no longer regarded with any feelings of jealousy. Mr. Money and every one else admitted that nothing could be more manly and creditable than Sheppard's manner of taking his defeat. Minola seldom heard him spoken of but with respect.

The women are not many on whom the public opinion of those immediately around them has no influence in determining their estimate of a man. Minola began to see that there were qualities in her old lover for which she had not given him credit. This, indeed, she had seen for herself during the contest at Keeton. He had, at all events, a certain manly dignity, even if he was slow and formal. She may, too, have been impressed in certain moods with the strength and patience of his feelings for her. In some melancholy moments she felt a sympathy for him, and found a

sort of sad amusement in admitting to herself that she and her old lover were alike in one part of their destiny, at all events. But she was sincerely glad to hear that Sheppard was beginning to go out a good deal, and she had a strong hope and conviction that in society he must very soon get over his old feelings for her. All that was natural enough, she thought, when they both lived in the country, and he knew very few women; but here in London he must meet with many girls a thousand times more attractive—so she was honestly convinced—than she could possibly appear even to the most prejudiced eye, and he would soon get over the weakness that exalted a country girl into a heroine and a goddess. He would meet with women who knew the world—the world of politics and of society—who could assist a man in his public career and in his natural ambition, and some one of whom would doubtless be found to marry him. The thought gave Minola sincere gratification.

Some of this is told a little in anticipation; for we are, as yet, in the first few weeks that followed the Keeton election. There is one, nay, there are two, of the personages most prominent to our eyes in that contest, of whom we have some account to render before the story resumes its regular march.

Poor Herbert Blanchet found himself a man sadly changed in his own estimate when the subsidence of the riot in the Keeton streets left him stranded high and dry, and still alive. Not only was he alive, but he was absolutely uninjured. The dignity of the slightest wound was not on him to make him interesting. All that commotion that had seemed to him so terrible that his very soul shrank from it, turned out to be, so

far as he was concerned, more innocent and harmless than a schoolboy game of wrestling. He had been ridiculous when shrinking from the riot, and he now felt that he must have been ridiculous when by sheer force he mastered his quivering nerves and threw himself literally into it. In the very thick of the battle, and when he came to Heron's aid, he thought he saw an inclination to good-humoured laughter on Heron's face at the sight of him and his weapon. When the riot was over, and the crowd began to disperse, and the Liberal leaders went into the hotel, nobody took any notice of him. He seemed to be of no account in the eyes of any one. Men whose companion he had been during his share of the campaign in Keeton passed him rapidly by and did not seem to recognise him; they were all thinking of other things and other persons, clearly. Even Heron, to whose help he had come, did not think it worth his while apparently to make any inquiry about him.

We know, of course, that Heron did find time and thought to ask about the poet; but the poet did not know this. The thought, however, which most disturbed Blanchet's mind was not that Heron had been ungrateful to him, but that clearly, in the mind of men like Heron, the whole affair was a matter of no moment—an ordinary event at an election, involving an amount of danger such as men encounter in their huntings and their other pastimes of which Blanchet knew little, and not enough to be seriously thought of a moment after it was past. It was, then, for danger such as this that the poet had twice made himself ridiculous in the eyes of Minola Grey. It was for danger like this that he had exposed himself to hear from her the bitterest

words that man can hear from woman. In truth, it is not certain that poor Blanchet was really a coward. He had been put suddenly in front of a sort of trial entirely new to him, and his physical nerves had shrunk from it at first. He had not a virile nature; he had none of the strong animal spirits which carry so many men through all manner of danger without giving them time to think about it. He had not much, if we may say so, of the English nature in him; of that cool, strong, unimaginative nature which takes all tasks set to it very much as a matter of course, and goes at them accordingly to win or lose. When Nature was making Herbert Blanchet, there was for some reason or other a little too much of the feminine material put into his composition. We often see these slight mistakes on the part of Nature. We meet with a tall and bearded creature in whom a superabundance of the feminine is always showing itself; we find some pretty and delicate being in whom the judgment, the inclinations, the way of looking at things, are all unmistakably masculine. Blanchet had not lived a manly life; he had, indeed, not lived a life that would be wholesome for man or woman. It was not, be it understood, harmful or immoral, as lives are accounted on our somewhat dwarfed and formal principles of social good or harm; but it was a life without bracing strength of any kind. It was a life of sickly affectations and debauching conceits. It made sham as good as effort. In that sort of life it sufficed to think yourself a great person, and to say to your friends that you were so, and there was no occasion for the long, healthy, noble labour that, with whatever genius, is needed to develope success. It was a life of ghastly groping after originality; a life

in which one became fantastic, not out of superabundant fancy, but of set purpose. The moment an entirely new situation was presented to Blanchet, and he was called upon to act under circumstances not previously thought out and reduced to theatric form, all the shams were suddenly blown away, and the weakly, naked nature was left shivering and shuddering in the rough, unaccustomed air of reality.

Little Mary Blanchet was sitting alone the day after the riot at Keeton. It was drawing on towards evening, and she had her books of manuscript out on the table and was at work at her poems. She was very particular about the copying of her poems; she began a long poem in a bound volume with ruled leaves, and if, in copying, she made any mistake, even of a word, she put that volume aside and began another. Therefore the one poem at which she was now engaged had already produced several of these manuscript books, without itself approaching much nearer to completion. She was seated before the work with her pen in her mouth and her eyes fixed on the ceiling, and was in a little doubt between a rhyme which was of excellent sound but doubtful grammar, and one of which the grammar was all right but the sound was open to challenge. Her own sympathies went altogether with the good rhyme, and she was strongly inclined to run the risk of being a little superior for once to those narrow grammatical rules which offend so many poetesses. While thus, like the Achilles of Pope's Homer, "in anguish of suspense delayed," she was told that her brother wished to see her.

Mary sprang up in excitement, let her ink-steeped pen fall on her book, thus reducing a new volume to

worthlessness, and, scarcely stopping even for a plaintive murmur, ran out and brought Herbert Blanchet into the room. She was convinced that he must have some important intelligence. Could it be that he had proposed for Minola, been accepted, and had come back to London in all speed to arrange for the wedding? His face, however, did not look like that; it was haggard and miserable, and the poet had evidently not slept the past night. Mary felt her heart sink within her as she looked at him.

Blanchet sat down and passed his hands wildly through his unkempt hair—hair that, however, looked so beautiful, Mary thought.

“Well, my sister,” he said, with a gloomy effort at being light and careless of speech, “I have come back, you see.”

“What has happened, Herbert dear?” the affrighted old maid asked; and she trembled all over.

“Nothing particular, Mary; only that your brother has made a fool of himself.”

Then he smiled in a dismal way, with ghastly lips and livid face; and then he put his hands to his forehead, and burst into tears.

Never was a woman more frightened than poor Mary. She had never seen a man in tears before; she remembered having read and shudderingly admired a line in a poem of Mrs. Hemans’s, in which she, Mary Blanchet, and all the world in general were advised not to talk of grief until they had seen the tears of bearded men. Poor Mary always thought that the tears of bearded men must be something very dreadful to see; but she never expected to see them, for she did not think it possible that Englishmen, the only race of

men she knew, could shed tears under any provocation. Now she was compelled to look on the tears of a bearded man whom she dearly loved; and she found that Mrs. Hemans's suggestions fell far short of the dreadful reality. She tried all she could to comfort her broken-hearted brother; but comfort is particularly unavailing when one does not even know the source of the trouble. It was some time before poor Blanchet could give his sister any coherent account of his distress. When the story was told, however, it did not seem so hopeless to Mary as she had expected. He had not been refused by Minola; he had not even proposed to her. She did not attach much importance to the fact that Minola had supposed him—wrongfully, of course—to be a coward. He could easily prove, if indeed he had not done it already, that he was as brave as she, Mary, knew her brother must be. It was wrong of Minola to judge so quickly and so harshly, and very unlike Minola; but, after all, what did it prove but the deep interest which she took in Herbert? She was disappointed when she thought he was not all that she had expected. What did that prove but that she had expected great things? Well, it was not by any means too late to prove that her first expectations were true estimates of Mary's brother.

It is a truth that Herbert Blanchet gradually became encouraged, and almost restored, if not to his good opinion of himself, yet to his hopes. It was wonderful what a person of importance, a wise counsellor, a trusty friend, his sister grew to be in his eyes all at once. How long is it since he thought her an absurd little old maid in whom no person of artistic soul could possibly feel any interest? How long is it

since he fully believed that Minola Grey was kind to her partly out of pity, and partly because it looked picturesque and charming for a handsome young woman to be the patroness and friend of an unattractive elderly woman? How long is it since he was ashamed of the relationship, and would gladly have given Minola to understand that he considered his sister only a poor little, old-fashioned person, whose pretences at poetry and art had his entire disapproval? And now he wept upon her faithful bosom, and drew comfort from her flattering but very sincere assurances; and poured out his feelings over and over again; and asked her to tell him over and over again this, that, and the other thing that Minola had said; and found comfort in her talk; and would rather have been in her company that evening than in the centre of the beloved school, or in the drawing-room of a lady of rank. If poor little Mary could have thought of such a thing as being revenged upon her brother for all his long neglect, his selfish desertion of her, she might have found herself well avenged that night when he clung to her, and hung upon her words, and was only restored to think life worth having by her flatteries and her promises that she would do all for him, and had good hope to make everything come right even yet.

So far as Mary was concerned, she had hardly ever been so happy. It was enough to make her happy at any time to know that she was of importance to her poet-brother. But she had also now from him the confession of his passionate love for her friend. It had always smote a little on Mary's conscience that, in helping her brother in his scheme about Minola, she was not quite certain whether, after all, the poet really

loved Minola as Mary thought Minola deserved to be loved. Now she was satisfied on this point. Herbert had poured out his whole heart to her, and had shown her that his love for Minola was deep, passionate, eternal. It did not occur to Mary to suspect that there could be a woman on earth, even Minola, who was capable of rejecting the love of a man like Herbert Blanchet. That was Mary Blanchet's happiest night thus far in London; her happiest night thus far in life.

In his misery Blanchet had told the truth. He was really in love with Minola. He had gone in for money and a beautiful wife, and he had lost himself hopelessly in the game. His self-conceit had readily made him believe that the handsome, simple country girl who thought so much of his sister must fall in love with him. It was only by degrees it dawned upon him that there was a clear strength in Minola's character such as he had thought no women ever had. He began to see that she was friendly to him, but otherwise unconcerned; and that he was fairly in love with her. He began to be ashamed of the pitiful hopes he had formed about her money; he began to be ashamed of a good deal of his character and career. The genuine extravagance of the delight which he felt when she enabled him to put his poems before the world in such splendid dress, had almost as strange an effect on him as the gift of the bishop's candlesticks on poor Jean Valjean. It shook all his previous theories of life and its philosophy, to find that there was so much of simple generosity in the world; especially to find it in the heart of a girl over whom his charms and his affectations seemed to have no manner of in-

fluence. He found that he had his world to reconstruct. He went home and passed some wretched days. He looked back on his life, its theories, its affectations, its pitiful little vanities, and he wondered how he could ever have thought to make genuine poetry out of such shams of emotion and simulacra of beauty. It would require fairy power indeed to spin such rubbish of straws into gold.

Still, he had some hopes from Mary and her influence over Minola. It had come to that; his sister now was his chief resource and his star of hope. The artful Mary was not long in bringing her plans to maturity and to proof.

"Minola dear," she said one evening after Miss Grey had settled down in London again, "do you really never think of getting married?"

"Never, Mary; why should I, if I don't like?"

"Well, you can't live always alone in this kind of way."

"But I am not living alone in any kind of way."

"Not now; not exactly now. But I may not live, you know; I don't feel at all like myself lately; and I shudder at the idea of your being left alone. I am so much older than you, Minola."

"But, Mary, my dear little poetess, if you think marriage such a good thing, why didn't you marry?"

Mary sighed, and cast at her leader a look of gentle, melancholy reproach.

"Ah! there were reasons for my not marrying which happily don't exist for you. And then my life would be a wretched one, Minola, but for you. Where are you to get a Minola, dear, when you come to be as old as I am now?"

The prospect of growing old never frightens the young. It is their conviction that, at worst, they will die before that comes about. It was not, therefore, the thought of becoming like Mary Blanchet, that made Minola seem melancholy for the moment. It was the thought of the weariness that life must have for her in any case, young or not. She remained thinking for a second or two, until she became conscious that Mary was waiting for her to say something. Then she tried to get rid of the subject.

"Well, Mary, at all events I need not trouble myself about marriage just at this moment; I don't want to be like the girl in the old song, who refused the men before they asked her. No one has been asking me lately."

"I know some one," Mary broke out, "who would ask you if he dared. I know some one who loves you—who adores you."

Minola looked round in amazement. It did not occur to her at the moment to think of what or whom poor Mary meant.

Mary rose from her chair and ran to Minola, and threw herself on the ground near her in supplication, with her eyes full of tears.

"It's my brother, Minola; it's my brother! He adores you. He would die for you. He will die for you if you won't listen to him. Oh, do listen to him, darling, and make us all happy!"

Minola rose from her chair in such anger as she had seldom known before. She was not even particularly careful how she extricated herself from Mary's clinging grasp.

"Are you speaking seriously, Mary?" she asked, in a low tone and with determined self-restraint.

"Oh, Minola darling, it's only too serious! He was here the other day. He is wretched, he is miserable, because he thinks you were angry with him. I thought he would die—I think he will die. He didn't want to tell any one; but a sister's eyes can't be deceived. And it's no use, and he so loves you."

Minola could have found it in her heart to curse Love and all his works. This distracting revelation was too much for her. It was utterly unexpected. She had never for a moment thought of this. Herbert Blanchet had always seemed to her a person to help and pity, and sometimes to be angry with and despise. Even if she had been a vain girl, it is not likely that the announcement of his love would have gratified her vanity.

"Did he send you to tell me this, Mary?"

"No, dear," Mary said humbly, losing heart and hope with every moment, as she looked into Minola's face, which was pale, and cold, and almost hard in its expression. "No, dear; but I thought it would be better, perhaps, if I were just to speak to you a little about it first, just to know how you felt, and then I might perhaps encourage him or not, you know; and I thought that might not be so unpleasant, perhaps, Minola."

"You are right, Mary; it is much less unpleasant. But I think I need not give you any further answer, need I?"

Minola's manner was strangely cold and hard. She could not help feeling as if there were something like treachery in this secret arrangement of brother and

sister to try to persuade her into a marriage which she would otherwise never have thought of. Both brother and sister seemed for the moment mean in her eyes; and Minola hated meanness.

Mary looked wistfully into her leader's cold, stern face. It must be said for Minola that the coldness and sternness came from disappointment rather than from anger. It seemed to her that her closest friend had betrayed her.

"Is there no hope for him?" Mary asked, faintly.

"I wish you would not talk in that foolish way," Minola said coldly. "It is not worthy of you. It ought to be no hope to any man that a girl who does not love him or think about him in any such way should marry him. And if a man is so silly, his sister ought to have better wishes for him. *I* would not degrade my brother—if I could say I had one and were fond of him—by speaking of him in such a way. I hope your brother has more sense, Mary, and more spirit, than you seem to think."

"He so loves you, Minola; he does indeed," Mary feebly pleaded.

"If he really loves me—and I hate to use the word, and I hate to hear it—I am sorry for him, Mary; and I am ashamed of him, and I feel a contempt for him, and that's all. I hate to think of men grovelling in that way, or of women either; but I do think that if women are such idiots, they, generally at least, have the spirit to hide their folly and not to degrade themselves."

"But, Minola, a man must speak some time, you know, or how can he tell?" Mary argued, plucking up a little spirit on behalf of her misprized brother.

"Your brother might have known perfectly well. He must have known. What word did I ever say to him that could make him think I cared for him? Do you think, if a girl cares for a man, and wants him to know it, she doesn't let him see it? I believe," Minola added in her bitterness, and with a meaning known only to herself, "women have trouble enough to hide their feelings even when they don't want them to be known."

With this word she left the room abruptly, and would hear no more.

So ended poor Mary Blanchet's first attempt to plead the love-cause of her brother.

CHAPTER IX.

"Was ever Woman in this Humour Wooed?"

THE days were not pleasant for Minola or Mary which followed this disclosure. The two friends for a time did not seem as if they were the same persons; there was a cold constraint between them. Minola soon got over her anger to poor Mary, and was only angry with herself for having spoken harshly to the unhappy old maid; but she could not revive the confidence that had existed between them before. She felt that between them now was something that killed confidence. She tried to speak to her companion in tones and words if possible more kindly and friendly than ever; but the genial heart of friendship which makes mere words into sweet realities was hardly there any more.

Mary Blanchet was not very good at disguising her feelings. Even from Minola, whom she loved, and of whom she stood in some awe, she made little effort to conceal the fact that she felt herself a sufferer. The curse in the dead man's eye, which told so heavily on the Ancient Mariner, was far more bitter, doubtless, than the silent reproach in Mary's eye; but Minola was much oppressed by the latter. She felt as if she had been doing some wrong to Mary and to the cause of friendship and common sisterly womanhood; and, like all generous natures, she was disposed, when the

heat of anger and surprise was over, to throw all the blame on herself, or at least to be troubled with the fear that she must have been to blame. She began to long for a full reconciliation with Mary. She reproached herself with having brought the poetess away from her home and her friends at Keeton; as if poor Mary had any home there, or any friends there or elsewhere, except Minola herself.

"I am going to see my brother," Mary Blanchet said one evening, not without a gentle reproach in her voice.

"Yes, Mary? I am glad. You will give him my regards—my very kind regards—will you not?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, if you wish it." This was followed by a little sigh, as if Mary would have said, "I don't think there is much comfort in that, if that is all."

Minola looked up and saw the melancholy little face. She was greatly touched. She thought of their long friendship, going back to the days when she was a little child, and regarded Mary as another Elizabeth Barrett. She remembered her own brother and her love for him, and her heart was pierced by the expression in Mary's face. She went to the poetess and put her arms round her neck, and the poor poetess fairly gave way and was drowned in tears.

"It's so unhappy; it's all so unhappy," sobbed Mary. "I never thought it would come to this. I can't bear to think of him so, and that he should be so wretched; I can't, indeed."

Minola waited for a while to let this grief have way; and, indeed, it must be owned that her own tears were hard enough to restrain. Then, when the pas-

sion of the poetess had a little abated, and Minola thought she could listen to reason, she began to reason gently, very gently.

"I know you blame me for this, Mary, my dear old friend, even when you try not to show it. But tell me, Mary, where am I to blame? You know I don't want to marry, and you know I ought not to marry any one if I don't—if I don't love him, dear. I do not love your brother in that way; and it would be doing him a great wrong if I were to marry him merely because I was fond of you, you foolish, kind old Mary. *He* would only feel offended by such an idea; and quite right. I almost wish I could marry him, dear, for your sake, and for the sake of all the old times and the pleasant days we have had together, and the evenings, and the confidences—all the dear old times! But you would not ask me to do that, Mary? you would not let me do it, if I were inclined?"

Mary sobbed a doubtful assent to this proposition. It is to be feared she felt in her own heart that she would be glad if her friend would marry her brother on any account.

"You don't know what it is to me," Mary murmured out, "to see him so unhappy."

"But, my dear, that won't last always; he will get over that. I am not so foolish, Mary dear, as to believe that there is anything in me which your brother will not find in twenty other girls."

"But that's because you don't believe he has any strong feelings at all," Mary said, reproachfully. "You do him wrong, Minola. You don't mean it, I know; but you do him wrong. He has strong feelings, indeed he has. Don't you think *I* know?"

Minola might, perhaps, with truth have said that she had no profound reliance on Mary's power of reading character even in the case of her brother; but she did not touch that point.

"I am sure he has strong feelings, Mary; I am sure of it now. I didn't think so once, perhaps—you are quite right in that—but I am sure now that I was mistaken. I have a great regard for your brother; much too great a regard," she added, with a certain bitterness in her tone, "to believe he could waste much of his life in idle regret because a girl like me did not marry him."

"It's all very well for you, Minola," Mary said, raising her head and throwing something like downright anger into her voice; "it's all very well for you, who don't have any of these feelings. You don't care for any one—in that way, I mean. You don't care for any man. Other people can't have such strong feelings."

Minola broke down. Why she did so, only the benign powers that understand human and especially womanly weaknesses can tell; certainly Minola never could explain. She had gone through ordeals, one might have thought, far worse than this, and kept a serene face and her secret safe. But there was something in this unjust reproach coming from the poor old friend whom she had known so long, and for whom she had persistently done so much, that quite overcame her. The words found out the very heart of her womanhood and her weakness; the place where her emotions had no steel plates of caution ready put on to protect them. Half in tears, half in hysterical laughter, she broke away from Mary.

"Oh, you unjust, silly, foolish old Mary! It's not

true a word that you are saying. I am as great a fool as *he*, and as you, and as all the rest, I suppose! Don't I know what such feelings are? Oh, how I wish I didn't!"

Mary looked up in utter amazement.

"Why, Minola darling, it *can't* be——"

"But I tell you it can be and it is, Mary—and now do let me alone for the future. Oh, yes, I *am* in love—up to the roots of my hair, dear, if you like the words—I can't think of any other. There, I have made a fool of myself and humbled myself enough for one day, I think! Now go and see your brother, like a good, dear creature, and leave me to myself for a little. Don't ask me to tell you any more; if I ever do tell you any more, it shan't be now. I hate and despise myself for all this; but it's true, Mary, as true as death, or any other certain thing you like."

Then Minola turned away, and resolutely sat down to the piano and began to play. Mary knew that there was nothing more to be got out of her just then; and, indeed, she was too much overwhelmed by what she had heard to have any clear purpose of extorting more. She made her preparations to go out in silence; but the very manner in which she tied her bonnet-strings gave expression, somehow, to a sound of wonder. She went out with no other good-bye to Minola than was conveyed by a gentle pressure on her shoulder as she passed, meant to express all a world of renewed sympathy, fellowship, and devotion.

It could hardly be said that Mary had yet had breathing-time enough to allow her to begin forming any conjecture as to the person who must needs be involved in Minola's bewildering confidence. The re-

velation itself filled her mind for a while, to the exclusion of all other thought. But, as she was going along the street, she saw coming towards her a figure which, even with her short sight, she thought she recognised. It was that of a man taller than any one else she knew, even than her brother, and who had stooping shoulders and a walk of lounging complacency—a walk as of one who rather fancied that all the street belonged to him. When this person came near he raised his hat and made a bow of recognition to Mary, and then the poetess saw that she was not wrong in supposing that it was Mr. St. Paul. He was evidently going in the direction of Minola's lodgings. A sudden thought flashed upon Mary Blanchet's mind.

"Can it be *he?*?" she thought. "I should never have supposed such a thing. But he was very attentive to her, certainly; and of course he is a man of high family—not like poor Herbert. But I never should have thought of him."

While Mary went her melancholy and meditative way, Mr. St. Paul arrived at Minola's door, and asked to see her, adding that he came to take leave, and would not keep her long. The servants at Minola's lodgings had an immense awe and veneration for Mr. St. Paul. When he called there once before and saw Minola, on the day of the unholy compact, Mary, having heard of the visit, could not keep down the pride of her heart, but let out the fact that he was a duke's brother. In that quiet region the brothers of dukes are rare visitors, and it was not likely that the face and form of this one could have been forgotten. Therefore, even if Minola had taken the precaution to say that she would see no one that day, it is very doubtful

whether the servants would have understood this general order to apply to a duke's brother. Anyhow, it was intimated to Minola, in tones of some awe, that the gentleman who was a duke's brother wanted very particularly to see her.

Minola was not in spirits for enjoying the visits of dukes, not to say of the brothers of dukes. But she felt that she really owed some thanks to Mr. St. Paul; and she had never seen him since the night of the Keeton riot; and if he was really going away, she did not wish him to go without a word of thanks from her. It may be said, too, that, in spite of all his defects and his odd ways, Minola rather liked him. There was a sort of reckless honesty about him; and his talk was not commonplace. So she agreed to see him, not without a dread that there might still be traces of the tears which had lately been in her eyes. "What does it matter," she asked of herself in scorn of her own weaknesses, "even if he does see? I suppose he knows very well that women are always in tears about something."

"Well, Miss Grey," he said as he came in—and he seemed positively to grow taller in the gathering dusk, like the genie in the story of Bedreddin Hassan—"I haven't seen you since the night of the row at Keeton. Wasn't it capital fun? The poet ran away, I hear; they say he never stopped until he reached London." Mr. St. Paul laughed his usual good-humoured laugh, and he held, as if unconsciously, Minola's hand a moment in his own. His manner was never a love-making one, and Minola hardly noticed this slight familiarity.

"Oh, there was no truth in all that!" she said hastily, and not without a half-smile. "Mr. Blanchet did

nothing of the kind; although, like me, he does not like noisy crowds."

"Well, I kept my word, you see, Miss Grey. I sent your man in, in spite of them all."

"You did, indeed; and I ought to feel very much obliged to you, and I do feel obliged, Mr. St. Paul; although my conscience is still sadly distressed to know if I did anything very wrong in allowing you to do anything of the kind."

"Don't you mind that; it's all right; it was a much more honest trick than half the dodges by which elections are won, I can assure you. There are always wheels within wheels in these affairs, you know. You were in your rightful place, too; in all these things there is sure to be a petticoat in the background. It might as well be you as any one else—as my sister-in-law, for instance."

"And you are going away, Mr. St. Paul?"

"I think so; yes. If things don't turn out as I want them to, I shall go away again, I think. I don't see what I want here; I have done my duty as a brother, you know, and kept old Sheppard, my brother's man, out of Keeton."

"Are you going back to America?"

"In the end, yes; I suppose so. But not just for the present. I feel inclined to take a run through Thibet. I am told by some fellows that the yak is the most extraordinary creature; and the place hasn't been used up. You see, Miss Grey, I have enough of money one way and another; and I am inclined to consult my own whims now a little. Come, what are you smiling at?"

"I don't feel inclined to explain, Mr. St. Paul."

"I'll do it for you—you smile because you think I never did consult any whims but my own; is not that it?"

"Yes; if I must give an answer, that was it."

"Of course; I knew it. What I meant was that I don't intend to bother any more just now about the making of money. But I do particularly want to be allowed to consult the whims of some one besides myself."

"Indeed?"

"You say that sarcastically, I know. You don't think much of us men, it seems; at least, you say you don't."

"Do you, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Do I what?"

"Think much of men?"

"Oh, no, by Jove! if you come to that. I never said I did, nor women either. But we all like to believe, I suppose, that you women think us fine fellows and greatly admire us—that is, when you are young. Anyhow, I don't mean to discuss the defects of the human race with you just now, Miss Grey. I have come for a different purpose. But won't you sit down?"

She had not asked him to be seated; and it seemed like a mild rebuke of her lack of hospitality when Mr. St. Paul now handed her a chair. But he had no such meaning. He was positively a little embarrassed, and did not well know for a moment how to get on. Even Minola noticed the fact, and made a good-natured attempt to help him out of his difficulty, greatly amazed to find that he could have any hesitation about anything.

"You were saying that you want to consult somebody's whims, Mr. St. Paul?"

"Yes, so I was; that's what I have come about. I should like to be allowed to consult your whims, Miss Grey."

"That's very kind; but I don't know that I have any whim just at present. When there is another election coming off somewhere, then, indeed——"

St. Paul laughed. He was holding a chair. He turned it and balanced it on two of its legs, and then leaned on the top of it with both his hands in such a manner that Minola began to be afraid it would give way under his bulky pressure and send him prostrate at her feet. The odd attitude seemed, however, to give him a little more self-possession.

"Look here, Miss Grey; let's come to the point. Will you marry me?"

He now let go the chair and stood upright, looking straight at her, or rather, down upon her.

Minola felt her breath taken away. She actually started.

"That's what I am here for, Miss Grey. To come to the point at once, will you marry me?"

"To come to the point at once, Mr. St. Paul, I will not."

"Why not?" He put his hands into his pockets, and coolly waited for an answer.

"But there are so many reasons——"

"All right; tell me some of them."

"But really I don't know where to begin."

"Well, just think it over; I can wait. May I take a seat?"

"Oh, yes; pray be seated."

He sat quietly near her. His manner was now once more perfectly assured, but, with all his odd roughness, perfectly respectful.

"Now we can talk the matter regularly out, like sensible people," he said.

The situation was new, to say the least of it. Minola began to be a little amused now that she had recovered from the first shock of her embarrassment; and she saw that with such a wooer it would be far the wisest policy to talk the matter out as he had proposed. So she began to rack her brain, not for reasons against accepting the proposal, but for the reason which ought properly to come first.

"To begin with, Mr. St. Paul, I am not sure that you are in earnest in such an offer."

"Oh, if that's all, I can easily reassure you. I am confoundedly in earnest, Miss Grey! As you say, I have generally been in the habit of pleasing myself more than other people; and the truth is, that nothing on earth would please me now half so much as for you to take me as I offer myself. But I think I shouldn't make half a bad husband, after all; and honestly, do you know, I don't believe you would be sorry in the end?"

"But why do you want to marry me? why not some other woman? why not some one in your own class?"

"My class? Fiddle-de-dee! what's my class? I am a cattle grower from Texas; I am a land speculator from California. If I had been depending on what you call my class, I shouldn't have enough now to give a girl bread and cheese, to say nothing of her milliner's bill. I have plenty of money, thanks to myself. I'm

the son of my own works; I'm the son of Marengo, as what's-his-name?—Napoleon—said."

"But there are so many women whom you must have met and who would be suited to you so much better——"

"Look here, Miss Grey; cut that! You are the only girl I ever saw—I mean, of course, since I was a boy—that I care a red cent for. There's something about you that other girls don't have. You have no nonsense in you, not a bit! A man need not feel ashamed of caring about you or trying to please you. I saw that long ago; you are a woman to do a man some good. You are not spoiled by society, and all that rot. I suppose you never were in society—what they call society—in your life?"

"No, Mr. St. Paul; I never was. I never was in any house in London but Mr. Money's; I suppose that isn't society?"

"Well, there it is, you see. I like a girl who is not just the same pattern as every other girl. Look here! I don't say that I am madly in love with you in that sentimental way; I suppose that sort of thing does not last at my time of life with a man who has knocked about the world as I have; but I do say that you are the pleasantest woman I know, and the cleverest, and I'm sure the best; and you are the only woman I would marry."

"But I am afraid, Mr. St. Paul, that we like to be loved in that sentimental way, we foolish girls. I don't think I could be quite pleased with anything else; and I am glad you are so candid as to tell me the whole truth." Minola now thought she saw a way of getting

good-humouredly out of the affair without seeming to take it too seriously.

"Not a bit of it; you are not that sort; you have too much sense for nonsense like that. Why, just listen. I was sentimentally in love before I was quite twenty years old—I wonder what age were you then?—and I was wild to be allowed to marry a poor girl, the daughter of the fellow who taught me French. Didn't I get into a nice row at home? and the poor girl, they hunted her out of the place—my people did—as if she and her old father had been mad dogs. I dare say my people were right enough in opposing such a marriage; I dare say I should have been tired of her long ago; but if you want sentimental love and so forth, that was my time for it, and that was what it all came to."

"You are glad now you did not marry her," Minola said; "you will be glad some time that you did not marry me. I will be generous to you, Mr. St. Paul; I will not take you at your word."

"No, no! that's all nonsense; you don't understand. I only told you about that to show you how that sort of sentimental love is nothing at all. I know what I am about now; I know my own mind; it would be time for me, by Jove! Yes; I know my own mind."

"So do I; and I can't accept your offer, Mr. St. Paul."

"But you have not told me a single reason yet——"

"I don't want to marry; I had much rather remain as I am. I am not a great admirer of men in general, and I think I am more likely to be happy living as I do——"

"If you marry me," he said, "you may live in any part of the world you like, and any street you like, and any way you like."

Minola smiled. "How happily you would pass your life," she said, "living in the West Centre of London with me and Mary Blanchet!"

"Well, if the wandering fit came on me, and I wanted a rush half across the world, and you did not care to come too, you might please yourself, and remain here with old Mary until I came back. I rather like old Mary; I met her a few moments ago."

"I fear it would not do, Mr. St. Paul."

"You bet it would—I mean, I am quite sure you and I could hit it off admirably, if you'll only give us the chance and let us try."

"But if we tried it, and did not hit it off, what then?"

"I know we should; I know it. And do you know, Miss Grey, I have often thought that you rather liked me—I don't mean the sentimental falling in love, and all that: you are too sensible a girl for that; and I'm not exactly the sort of fellow to make a woman feel in that way—but I often thought that you rather liked me, and liked to talk to me, and did not look at me with horror as if I were a sort of outcast, don't you know?"

Minola saw the great virtue of being frank and outspoken with this strange lover.

"You are quite right, Mr. St. Paul; I did rather like you, and I do still. I did like to talk with you, and I did not feel any particular alarm when you were good enough to talk to me. I fancied that you liked to talk to me——"

"You couldn't well avoid thinking that," he said with a smile; "for whenever I saw you in the corner of a room I made for you at once. I liked you from the first moment I saw you. Do you remember the day I first saw you?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. St. Paul; perfectly well."

"Come, then; tell me something about it."

"It was at Mrs. Money's one day. I was there in the drawing-room, and you came in with Mr. Money. It is not so long ago that I should forget it." Minola had other memories, too, connected with the day which she did not disclose to Mr. St. Paul, but which brought a faint colour into her cheeks.

"Yes, yes; that was the day. I had seen one of old Money's daughters—the younger one, the girl that is going to be married to that young fool Heron—and when I came into the drawing-room I thought you were the other daughter; and I said to myself that, by Jove, Money's elder daughter was worth a dozen of the other, and that I shouldn't be half sorry if she would marry me. I hadn't spoken a word to you then. So, you see, it is not an idea taken up on the spur of the moment."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. St. Paul——"

He made a deprecating gesture. Minola went on:

"And I do feel indeed that you have paid me a compliment, and done me an honour. But will you take me at my word, and believe that indeed, indeed, I never could accept your offer? It is out of the question. Mr. St. Paul—I may speak out with you?—if I were in love with you, I would not marry you——"

"Why not?" he asked almost vehemently, as he confronted her.

"Well, because we are not the sort of people to be married; we have such different ways, and such different friends——"

"By the way," he struck in, "that reminds me—your speaking about friends—of something I wanted to say; I am glad I have thought of it before you made up your mind. It's this—I hear you have money, or houses, or something of that kind. Well, don't you see, if you marry me, you can give it all, whatever it is, to old Mary what's-her-name. I don't want a dollar of it; I have plenty: so just take that into account before you decide."

"Thank you, Mr. St. Paul. I should have expected some generosity from you——"

"It isn't every fellow would do it, take my word for that."

"No, I suppose not; if I gave any one the chance. But I don't mean to do so, Mr. St. Paul. If I wished to marry I don't really know that I should refuse your offer. I am sure you would be more generous than most men, and I do like you; but, indeed, the thing is out of the question. We have no tastes or habits in common; and you would be tired of me very soon."

"Not a bit of it; we have tastes in common. I don't know any woman who can understand a joke so well as you can; and you don't always suppose everybody is in earnest, as women generally do. Most women are so dreadfully serious—don't you know?—that I find it a trial to talk to them. You are not like that."

"No," said Minola quietly; "I don't insist on people always being in earnest; and so I shan't treat you as if you were in earnest now."

"But I am in earnest; and I tell you what, Miss Grey, you must be in earnest too. I must have a serious, deliberate answer from you. I tell you on my honour, and on my oath, if you will allow me, that you are the only girl in the world I would marry; and I must be treated like a man in earnest, and have a serious answer."

"I have given you my answer already, Mr. St. Paul. I can't say anything more."

"Then you won't have me?" he asked, taking his hat from the table on which he had laid it.

"No, Mr. St. Paul."

"And this is quite serious and for the very last time?—as the children say;" and he held out one hand towards her.

She put her hand frankly into his.

"It is quite serious and for the very, very last time."

She felt a strong grip on her hand, so strong that it hurt her keenly for the moment. But she did not wince or make any attempt to draw the hand away. He released it in an instant.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said, "and that's all about it. I had hopes that I might have persuaded you, don't you know?—not that I thought a fine girl like you was likely to be in love with a fellow like me; but that I fancied you could do with me, on the whole, better than with some others. You see, I was not too self-conceited in the matter, Miss Grey. Well, that's all over, and there's an end of it. Good-bye; I dare say I shan't see you soon again. I shall be off for another run round the world. On the whole, I don't see anything better to do just now."

He was going.

"I am sorry if I have disappointed you; I am indeed," she said, and held out her hand to him again.

The bold blue eyes showed a gleam of a softer light in them.

"Oh, never mind about me, Miss Grey; I shall come all right, you needn't fear. I told you, you know, that I had outlived the age when men break their hearts; and, by Jove, a year ago I should have said I had outlived the age when I could ask any woman on earth to marry me. But I'll come all right; and I forgive you," he added with a laugh; "although at my time of life we don't like to make fools of ourselves before women. Good-bye. If you are in London when I come here next, I'll look you up; and if you want anything done then in the electioneering way, I'm your man——Hullo! here's old Mary back; I saw her passing the window. Good morning, Miss Grey; good morning."

He nodded in his old, familiar, easy way, and was out of the room somehow before Mary Blanchet got into it. Minola hardly saw how he got away. There was an odd moisture in her eyes and a swimming in her head which made it hard for her all at once to fall into talk with little Mary.

CHAPTER X.

The Member for Keeton.

"THE member for Keeton!" How strange it seemed to Minola that Victor Heron should thus have come to be connected in the mind of every one with the old home of her youth! On the day, not to be forgotten by her, when she saw him for the first time at Mr. Money's door, who could have thought that such a thing as that was likely to come to pass? Ah, who could have thought that other things yet more deeply concerning her were likely to come to pass? We may be all excused if sometimes under the pressure of some peculiar pain, or in the exaltation of some peculiar joy, we tell ourselves that there is a special fate in the things that concern us, and that the Destinies have our lives expressly in their care to gladden or to punish us. It is something of a consolation apparently to think that this trial, which we find it hard to bear, is not such as falls to the chance lot of ordinary mortals, but is set out by some special destiny for us alone. To Minola there seemed something fateful in the way in which Victor Heron had been so often and strangely made to cross her path. "The member for Keeton!"—and she had, it would seem, made him member for Keeton. In her brighter moments she was sometimes amazed and amused to think of the extra-

ordinary part she had been made to play in the political affairs of her native town. If she had been inclined to vanity, she might have found some consolation for any disappointment of her own in the homage that had been paid to her by such different admirers. But it gave her neither pride nor pleasure to know that some men admired her whom she could not admire in turn. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" was the thought that often filled her; and she cordially applied it to herself as well as to others. In truth, her secret love would in any case have kept her pure of vanity. Her pain gave her sympathy and made her strong.

Meanwhile the months went on, and she saw little or nothing of the member for Keeton—her member in a double sense: the representative of her borough, and returned by herself. The time of the honourable gentleman was now pretty fully engaged. He had no free hours left for strolls in Regent's Park, even if he had been at all inclined to go in that direction. He found himself more and more closely occupied by day and night. Victor Heron was successful in a double sense; he was a political and a social success. He had spoken in the House of Commons, and he had, by universal acknowledgment, made a hit. There is hardly any other success so delightful, so rich in immediate effect, left in our modern English life. His manner was fresh, easy, and animated, with now and then a stronger dash of something that went as near to eloquence as our House of Commons will endure in these days. He knew his subject—a question of foreign policy—thoroughly, and he was never dry or heavy. Then he became a social success as well, and at once. He was invited everywhere. He was envied for many things:

for his political chances, for his prospects as one who would probably be able to "entertain his party," and for the prospective possession of the very pretty girl who was seen so often with him, who was known to carry with her a large fortune, and whom he was, everybody said, about to marry.

Heron never knew what an important person he had become until he saw the difference which his altered position made in the number and kind of the letters which he found on his table every morning. They lay there in piles; letters on all manner of political, social, industrial, educational questions; letters from inventors, from theorists, from men—oh, how many of these there were!—from men with grievances; not a few from women with grievances. He soon found that even to look into half the questions of this kind which he was besought to investigate for himself would take up his whole time every day and night, making no allowance for food or sleep. At first, remembering his own grievance, he used to make a desperate effort to grapple with this huge bulk of complaint. Then he called in the aid of a secretary, and tried in this way to accomplish the task, and to be member for the aggrieved generally. But even this had to be given up. A staff of secretaries would have been necessary to get through the mere reading and answering of letters in cases with which, when he had mastered their details, he usually found that he could do absolutely nothing. This was in itself a disappointment and a pain to our young Quixote. He found that the task of redressing all or half the supposed human wrong that thrust itself querulously upon his notice would have been beyond his power, even though his summers to

such length of years should come as those of the many-wintered crow himself.

He was approaching, and with every prospect of success, the great business which had brought him back to England. He had given notice of a motion to call the attention of the House of Commons to the whole subject connected with his administration of the St. Xavier's Settlements and to move a resolution on it; and he had obtained a day for the debate, and a very animated and interesting discussion was expected. It had been hinted to him that if he merely wanted another appointment, and a much better one, the Government would be only too delighted to avail themselves of his services, and it was gently suggested that there never was any intention to visit his former administration with any censure whatever. But Victor remained, it is needless to say, absolutely deaf to all such suggestions as this. He desired to vindicate a principle, he said, and not to satisfy any personal interest. It is needless, perhaps, also to say that the suggestion was made to him in the most cautious and unofficial way. It was made by a mediator, who, if Heron had shown any disposition to accept it, would soon have put him in the way of receiving an official offer, but who the moment it was declined was able to speak of it as a personal suggestion or conjecture, only offered in the beaten way of friendship, and binding nobody to anything.

All this made a change in the position of Mr. Heron since the time, not so long ago, when he came to London almost unknown, and for a while haunted vainly the ante-chambers of great officials, and could not even get to speech of them. Victor was modest

enough, and often thought with a kind of wonder and humiliation of the chance he once so nearly ran of sinking down to be the mere possessor of a grievance, or one possessed by it, going round the world of London pestering people with the tale of a wrong in which they felt no manner of interest. He could not but feel proud and happy at some moments when he thought of the change a short time had brought about for him. He was well aware that he owed three-fourths of his success to the advice and the energy of Mr. Money. If he had not stepped out on the balcony of the Louvre Hotel in Paris that memorable night, he might never have met Mr. Money, and things might have been so different. In all his pride and his gratitude, were there ever moments when he was inclined to wish that he had not stepped out on that balcony, and that things had been different?

Was our young Quixote ungrateful or hard to satisfy? was he morbidly discontented, or mean, or intolerably fickle, or absurdly self-conceited? No; he was not any of these things. Yet it is certain that he was not happy. He had won success; he seemed likely to win much more, and he was already looking back many a time, and with genuine bitterness of regret, to the bright days when he appeared to be all a failure. Except in moments of excitement, Victor Heron was unhappy. He made his moments of excitement as many as he could, and he dreaded when they were over. He dreaded to be alone; and even that was not the worst, for there was society which gave him more pain than any solitude. When he came home of nights he sometimes sat in his chair and leaned his chin on his hand, and remained there for an hour

thinking. Anyone who had seen him at such times would have wisely said that the late hours of the House of Commons were telling heavily on him already, he looked so haggard.

He was indeed in a miserable dilemma, if that could by any possibility be called a dilemma which seemed to have no alternative or second way to it or out of it. He had made a fearful mistake, and found it out too late. In an impulse of gratitude, regard, surprise, generous humiliation, he had believed himself in love with Lucy Money—when he saw beyond mistake that she was in love with him. For an instant that light seemed to surround her in which a man sees the chosen one—the only one, the loved. The moment he saw that the sweet, good girl was in love with him, it seemed as if Heaven, and gratitude, and fate ordered him to marry her, and for the hour it was easy for him to believe that he loved her. Nor did the glamour pass away all at once. For some time yet he continued to believe that he had all he desired in life; that he loved and was happy, and had indeed found measureless content. There may have been even then a sense of unsatisfied craving in his heart, as of something missing which he had once hoped to find and possess. But he shut all such vague emotions down, and pressed the lid of what he told himself were his real convictions strongly down upon them. He told himself that he was happy. It has come far on the way towards unhappiness when a young man has to tell himself that he is happy in the woman he is to marry. Victor Heron caught himself arguing the question sometimes, and started and turned his thoughts another way, as some good person might have done

in older days if he found a diabolical temptation inducing him to blaspheme a saint or question his own faith.

The horizon only began to grow darker as his knowledge of himself and his state of mind grew clearer. Then there followed an interval during which he felt like one conscience-stricken. It seemed to him that, in admitting to himself what he felt, he was doing a wrong to poor Lucy which no kindness and no devotion on his part could atone for. Now came fits of devoted attention to her, when the poor little maid thought that never had there been lover like hers, and her soul floated softly in a golden haze of affection and gratitude. Then came what we may call the common-sense and worldly mood, when Victor Heron strove to get himself to regard his engagement as an ordinary young man of sense would doubtless have regarded it. He told himself that, after all, he ought to be one of the happiest of men; that he was going to have a charming young wife, as sweet a woman as any in the world. He remembered how Coleridge had said that a Desdemona is the wife that in his heart every man would like to have. He argued with himself about the impossibility of having everything exactly as one would appoint it for himself; and he sometimes marvelled how so sweet a girl as Lucy ever could have cared about him. On the whole he reasoned with himself as a sensitive and unworldly young man like him might be supposed to do, who has in a moment of impulse committed himself to a responsibility which he cannot any longer even wish to avoid. In truth, it was his grievance and not himself that was to blame. His grievance had so possessed and absorbed him that he

had not had time or thought for anything else. He had never asked of his heart what it would have until the hour for such a question had gone by. There was left to him one general frank resolve, to do his duty and make the very best of everything, and make, above all, those happy whose happiness in any way depended on him. After all, perhaps, marriage is not very often undertaken in much better spirit. A man's life, he had always heard from wise people, lies for the most part outside home and love.

But the member for Keeton kept clear of Minola Grey. He did so rather in obedience to an undefined instinct than to any deliberate resolve. He had not searched into his own feelings—rather, indeed, he had resolutely kept from all such search. But he avoided Minola Grey. Their sudden and sincere friendship had suddenly come to an end somehow. He thought that for some reason she had lately been displeased with him, and on the whole he was not sorry. It was better so. He heard of her a great deal from Lucy and from others, but he saw her very seldom.

One afternoon, early, Minola set out to pay a visit to Lucy Money. Lucy had written her a reproachful letter because she had not come more often lately, and insisting that she must see “dear, darling Nola *at once, at once,*” because of something most particular on which she wanted her advice “so much, oh, so much!” Minola had not great faith, perhaps, in the importance of the matter in hand, but she went promptly to see her friend. When she got to the house in Victoria Street she was shown at once into the drawing-room, and sat down, expecting every moment to hear the

light step of Lucelet. But Lucelet had gone out for a short time, and had only left instructions that if Miss Grey came she was to be shown into the drawing-room without a word, lest she might go away if she were told in the first instance that she, Lucy, was not at home. While Minola was waiting, the member for Keeton called; and the member for Keeton now was hardly supposed to ask any question, but to go and come in the house as though it were his own. If Lucy was not at home some other member of the family was likely to be, and, if anyone was there, it was assumed that Mr. Heron would come in and talk and wait.

Minola sat down to the piano to beguile the time, and began to sing and play to herself in her soft, pure, low tones. She sang the song of the lover's farewell to Northmaven, and to the maid who was to look over the wild waves in vain for the skiff of him who came not again—the song from "The Pirate," which she had herself adapted to the music of an old ballad. When Victor approached the drawing-room, and heard the sound of the piano, he thought at first that Lucy was the performer, and he paused a moment to listen, without interrupting her. But as the voice reached his ears, he knew its tones and he knew the song, and remembered when he had heard it last—when he had heard it first. The blood rushed into his face, and he literally started back. His sensitive lips trembled; his hands caught at his moustache in his old way when something excited or embarrassed him; and a sound almost like a groan involuntarily broke from him. Oh, how unhappy, how wretched he felt that moment! and how like some one guilty of a crime or a deceit,

merely because of the pain that he could not conceal from himself any more! At first he drew back and was about to go away. But he recovered himself, and asked of himself what possible excuse he could give to Lucy when she heard that he had actually been in the house, as she must hear from the servants, and that he had gone away without seeing her. He assumed that Lucy was in the drawing-room with Minola, and at that very moment they might come out and see him retreating as if he were a detected robber. He felt ashamed now of the sudden, absurd instinct of flight, and the ignoble, guilty suggestions it brought with it. "In Heaven's name," he thought, "why should I back out? Why should I not see Miss Grey or anybody else? Am I a fool or a boy?" He went on and crossed the threshold; and then for the first time he saw that Miss Grey was alone. It was too late to retreat, even though she was alone, for she had heard his footsteps, and stopped her song and rose from the piano, and waited to receive him.

"Oh—Miss Grey—I hope you are well!" was the remarkable observation with which Victor began.

"Quite well, thank you," was the appropriate reply.

There was much embarrassment on both sides. Naturally the man was the more embarrassed of the two. On him fell in all duty the responsibility of conducting the conversation. Yet, having got thus far, he did not seem inclined to try any farther.

"I thought I should find Lucy in," Minola said, since it seemed clear that she must say something, or let silence settle down upon them.

"I thought she would be here too," he said. "I suppose she has gone out."

This was so obvious an inference that it hardly called for addition or supplement of any kind. Minola said, "I suppose so," and that attempt appeared likely to come to an end.

"I hope you like the House of Commons," Minola began again.

"Oh, yes, certainly; very much; that is, I like it very well indeed. Have you never gone to hear a debate?"

"No, never."

"You must go. Oh, yes, you ought to go! You could go some night with Miss Money."

"With Lucy?"

"Yes, with Lucy I mean, of course."

He spoke in a sort of irritated way, very unlike the old manner of the chivalrous man with a grievance.

"I should like to go very much," Minola said; "I should like to hear you speak."

"Oh, I shan't speak often; I shan't speak, perhaps, more than once again; I don't care to be one of the talkers; I haven't the gift to make much of that sort of thing."

"I heard that you were a great success."

"Who told you so?" He put the question with some of his old directness, but not with the kind of boyish friendliness that used to make his simple straightforwardness seem sweet and genial. Now his tone sounded almost harsh. Minola began to think that his manners were not improving in his parliamentary career. Is it possible, she thought, that success is already spoiling him?

"Several persons told me," she answered quietly;

"and I read it in the papers. I am fond of reading the papers."

"Several persons told you so? Who were they?"

"Well, let me see——" Minola became all the more composed and mistress of herself in proportion as his manner seemed to grow more brusque and odd. "Mr. Money told me, for one; and of course Lucy told me; but she is prejudiced, and counts for nothing; and Mr. Sheppard told me."

"Do you see him often—Sheppard?"

"Not very often."

"When is he trying for Parliament again?"

"I don't know."

"But you wish him success, surely?"

"I shall wish him success if it does him any good, or makes him at all happy—or improves him in any way," Miss Misanthrope said demurely.

"You think it does not always improve people to be in the House of Commons?" Victor said, with a somewhat forced smile.

"Not always, perhaps; but I have had so little opportunity of judging."

There was a moment of silence.

"I don't think I can wait any longer," Victor said. "Are you waiting to see Lucy, Miss Grey?"

If Minola had spoken out the plain truth, she would have said that if he was going to wait she was not, and that if he was going away she would stay. Perhaps, if he had spoken out the plain truth, he for his part would have said much the same thing. As he was evidently going, she said—

"Yes, I shall stay until she comes in; I shall take

up a book and read; she will not be very long away, I should think."

"Will you be kind enough to tell her that I was here, and waited for her some time?"

"Certainly; with pleasure."

He seemed to be going, and yet he did not go; in truth, he was only thinking whether he ought to shake hands with her in ordinary friendly fashion, or whether he had better make a bow, and so take himself off. Not a matter of great moment, it might appear, and yet it was enough to torment Heron just then. If he seemed cold and distant and unfriendly, would not Miss Grey wonder at his manner, and perhaps think him rude and uncivil; or think him changed, and begin to conjecture what the reason of the change might be? If he showed himself friendly in the old way, would she become also friendly in the old way? and would not that perhaps be rather more of an ordeal than he could safely bear? But as he glanced towards her he thought he saw a look of surprise on her face, and this settled the matter. He could not allow her to think him cold or rude; and why should he not try to show himself as a friend?

Minola was seated, and had already taken up a book. He went up to her and held out his hand. Then he noticed for the first time how pale she was looking.

"Good-morning, Miss Grey," he said; "I am sorry I have to go so soon; it seems so long since we exchanged a word."

With this happily-chosen speech he came to a pause.

A faint colour came over the paleness of her face.

"You have become a public man now," she said, with desperate ease, "and your time is occupied. But we shall meet sometimes, I hope. I shall be always delighted."

There are incidents of martyrdom, perhaps, with which it is less difficult for the sufferer to deal than it was for Minola to assume the expression of smiling friendly ease that accompanied these words. Even as she spoke them she was thinking of how often she had warmly disputed the truth of Thackeray's constant assertion, that women are all skilled by nature in hypocrisy. She felt that she was then playing the hypocrite with a skill which she would once have believed it impossible for her to attain, and with a skill, too, which once she would have despised herself for possessing.

"Do you still walk in Regent's Park sometimes?" Victor asked.

"Yes, very often."

"I have not been there this long time."

"Oh, no; you have no time for that sort of thing now, I am glad to think. That is for idlers."

Meanwhile the ceremony of shaking hands had been duly executed. Victor was going, when his eyes fell on the book she had in her hand. He stopped again.

"That is Blanchet's volume of poems, isn't it?" he asked.

"Is it? Oh, yes, of course it is! I had only just taken it up, and I hadn't noticed." She coloured a little, a very little. She was somewhat embarrassed by his discovery of the fact that she had not known what book she held in her hand.

"Do you know, Miss Grey, that I always feel some remorse of conscience about that book? It was a shame that you should have been allowed to pay all that money; you ought to have allowed some one to share the cost with you at least."

"But I explained to you at the time all about that; I could not allow my Mary Blanchet to be indebted to anyone but me for any kindness. There was some selfishness in that, I know; but I could not help the feeling. And in any case I am sure Mary would have been wretched at the idea of anyone doing it but me. So it was not all selfishness on my part."

"The idea of your doing anything selfish! I don't believe you ever thought of yourself in all your life. Well, you were very generous to poor Blanchet; I hope at least he will not prove himself ungrateful."

"Oh, I don't want him to be grateful! I dare say he would be as grateful as anyone else—any other man, I mean, of course—if I wanted him to be."

Victor smiled the most natural and genuine smile he had yet shown during their conversation.

"Now you want to become the Miss Misanthrope again," he said. "But it doesn't deceive us who know you, Miss Grey. It was I who called you Miss Misanthrope, wasn't it—who suggested the name, I mean?"

"Yes, I believe it was; I am very well content with the name, and I think myself fairly entitled to bear it."

"Not you," he said. "I knew it didn't apply then, and I know it far better now."

"But to be a Miss Misanthrope isn't to be a criminal."

"No; but you couldn't be a misanthrope, unless in

some time when there was no possibility left of trying to prove that you loved the human race."

"Which, however, I can assure you, I do not."

"All the same, you try to help people. Well, good-morning."

"Here is Lucy," said Minola, looking up; "I am so glad you did not go at once."

Lucy ran into the room dressed as she had just come in from the carriage. She rushed at Minola and embraced her.

"So you were not going to wait for me?" she said breathless, and pointing to the hat which Victor held in his hand. "Yes, I know you were impatient, like all men, and you were for darting away, only dear Nola kept you and would not let you go! Now that was so kind of you, Nola."

"But, dear, I can't take the compliment or the thanks; it was no doing of mine; Mr. Heron was just going, only that you came in time and stopped him."

"I did not know when you were coming back, or whether you were coming at all," Victor said, "or I shouldn't have thought of going away; but I really have lots of things to do."

"Well, I am glad to hear that you were growing impatient," Lucy said with a smile, "for it looks as if you missed me, Victor; and I like you to miss me when I am away. It was Theresa who would have me to go out with her; and she said that there was some committee or something, and that you could not be here to-day, Victor—somebody told her."

Lucy looked very pretty. There was a light of surprise and gratification on her face because of the unexpected coming of Victor, which almost supplied the

place of the expression that high intelligence can lend. Minola looked at her with sincere admiration, and could not wonder that she had found a lover even in a man who might be supposed to seek naturally for a level of intellectual companionship higher than hers. But Victor was for the moment silent, nor did he and Minola speak to each other again until Victor rose to go, saying he had only looked in to see Lucy for a moment, and that he had an appointment.

"You are coming to dinner?" Lucy asked, with a colour of anxiety and hope on her pretty face.

He shook his head.

"I am afraid not," he said; "I fancy your father and I must put up with a hasty dinner got anyhow this evening, Lucy."

He was bowing to Miss Grey, and about to go, when Lucy said—

"Have you two been quarrelling, might I ask? Victor, do you generally take leave of Nola in that cool sort of way? Why, you used to be such friends."

"I am sure I hope we are 'such friends' still," Minola began, with a strenuous effort to be at ease.

"As good friends as ever," Victor rather awkwardly added.

"Then, why don't you shake hands?" inquired the pertinacious little Lucy. "Give me thy hand, terrestrial—so," she said, seizing one of the Shakespearian quotations which she had caught up from Minola, and was rather proud to display. "Give me thy hand, celestial—yes, Nola darling, you deserve to be called celestial, I think—give me thy hand, celestial—so;" and with pretty and gracious compulsion she drew

Minola and Victor together, and placed Minola's hand in his and made them clasp.

The friendly clasp was over in a moment. But in that short moment the eyes of Minola and of Victor met unavoidably, suddenly, for the first time that day, and then were as suddenly withdrawn; and each knew for the first time, and now to the full, what a misfortune had fallen on them all; and Lucy looked from one face to the other, and felt her heart stand still.

CHAPTER XI.

A Lounge in the Park.

It is true that this man and woman knew by one single meeting of the eyes that secret which he had never known before, and which she had never dreamed of. But each, as we have seen, was fatally prepared for the discovery. Each had for some time—one of the two for a long time—been brooding over the thought which represented one-half of the secret. Each heart was prepared to receive the impression of the other. The two natures were ready to affect each other as two substances are—as flint and steel are, as the burning-glass and the darkened paper. If anyone could have asked Minola Grey whether she thought Victor Heron loved her, she would have answered, if she thought such a question worth answering at all, that he did not; that he never had cared about her except perhaps as a friend. If Victor were asked whether he thought Minola cared about him, he would have answered, in all good faith, that he believed of late she rather disliked him than otherwise. Yet it is certain that each learned the secret of the other in the same moment as each glance betrayed its own secret. Come what would, from that moment these two were isolated from all others by their common knowledge of the truth.

That was a trying hour for Minola which she spent

in Victoria Street after Heron had gone. It was not perhaps less trying for Lucy; but Minola did not then know that. Fortunately for both of them, Lucy and her mother had an engagement that evening which made it impossible for Mrs. Money to press Minola to stay long with them. It was lucky, too, that visitors came in, and that while Minola was there she and Lucy were not left alone. If Minola had been less distracted than she was, she must have seen how very different Lucy's manner was from that which was usual to her; and how she was in alternation of wild, flighty spirits, and strange, shy, shrinking despondency. But in truth Minola's soul was all engrossed in the terror of the discovery she had made, and the necessity of hiding it, of burying it, at all risks. She was so little used to concealment or suspicion of any kind that it never occurred to her to think that perhaps Lucy might have seen what she had seen. Had the two girls been left alone for a moment, some revelation, some explanation, must perhaps have come. But contrary to her usual way Lucy did not try to get her friend into a separate corner or a separate room with her, and Minola was only filled by the one desire to get decently away, out of the house, and into the open air. She felt like some one shamed and guilty, like some treacherous, deceitful friend who had no right to stand beneath that roof any more. There were moments when the whole horizon of her hope seemed bounded by the moment when she could once more be in the open street, and free of the house which had always given her so kind a welcome.

Victor Heron walked slowly along Victoria Street. The day was warm and sunny; the spring was growing

rapidly towards summer. Even the sombre lines of Victoria Street were cheered and gladdened by the bright and youthful beauty of the season and of the day. The sense and sight of all this spring loveliness, tantalising often even to happy dwellers in the town, because it told them of the delights of the country they could not reach just then, sent a new pang into the heart of the distracted Heron. He had some appointments to keep, some persons to see, but he was unable to think of anything then but himself and his misfortune. He sauntered slowly with dragging steps, almost like an invalid, into St. James's Park, and sat down there and looked on the ground, and appeared for the time to be engrossed in drawing lines on the dust of the walk beneath him with the point of his cane.

He knew it all now. For some time back he had known only too well the state of his own feelings. He had known it although he shrank, as far as he could, from any search into his heart to find what stirred it so, holding it a sort of treason to his engagement and to the girl who loved him to ask any question of himself which must be a secret from her. But despite of this it had become known to him only too well that he had made a terrible mistake so far as his own fate was concerned. Yet what was that compared with what he now knew? This morning his course was clear. He had nothing greatly to repent of. He believed that he could not possibly have had the woman he loved and would have chosen; it was not much of a sacrifice to marry the sweet girl who loved him, certainly not wisely, but far too well. But now he had the misery of knowing that it was only his own fatal and stupid blindness

that had stood in the first instance between the girl he loved and him. She too was to be a sacrifice. There were three unhappy creatures linked together in a cruel bond of misfortune, which might never have been forged for them but for his astounding folly and darkness. There was no way out of it now but with misery to all. He was so tortured by the thought of the unhappiness he had brought on others that he had hardly yet a sense of mere regret for the happiness that might have been his. It was but after some period of distracted emotion that he began to be able to think of this.

Sudden and wholly unexpected as the discovery of the morning had been, there was no shadow of a doubt left on his mind as to its genuineness. It was an instant—a flash of bewildered, pathetic light in a girl's eye that drooped and turned away in the very glance, and he was as certain that Minola Grey and he stood isolated from all the world by a reciprocal and hopeless love as he was that the sun was now shining on his pain. He had little experience in love-making, but he knew this. All now seemed clear to him. Every strange word, or mood, or look of Minola which had puzzled him in other days was made clear to him now. Words and looks that he positively had forgotten came back, living and burning, on his memory. All was now made consistent, like a well-written tale, like a harmony. Yes; he might have been happy. She would have loved him. She was the only being on earth in whose company he had always felt that he could be quite himself, and all that was best in him seemed to grow without effort. She would have loved him. He would have had in her a companion to share every mood, and feel-

ing, and hope. To her intellect he could have looked up as well as to her heart. Good heavens! how did he fail to know all that before? When he found that involuntarily there was growing up in him a love for every place in which he knew that she walked; when the sound of her footfall brought a joy with it; when the voice of her singing made his heart thrill—how could he have failed even for a moment to know that it all meant, not friendship, but love?

She knows it all now, he kept thinking. He knew by the expression in her eyes that he had betrayed his secret as she had betrayed hers. Her life, too, was spoiled. And poor Lucy—the affectionate, innocent girl whose unsuspecting little freak of playful, childish confidence had of itself brought about all this discovery—was there to be no feeling, no pity for her? The very thought of the simplicity with which Lucy had brought their hands together was a new pain. She seemed so innocent, and he seemed so treacherous. In his misery he grievously exaggerated his own fault, and thought of his impulsive error as if it were a treason and a crime.

What fatality sent him into that place to remain there so long? Why did he not shake off all the brooding that was so futile, at least until his hours of work were over, and he was free to brood and be miserable alone? What has a busy man, for whom all sorts of persons and affairs are waiting, to do with sentimental regrets and the lamentations of a ruined lover—at least, what has he to do with them in the daytime? He was sitting there in a broad walk, near the little lake; and the seat he sat on was just near a turn of the walk, so that any promenader might come on him unthinking,

and recognise him before he had time either to rise and go away or to compose himself into attitude and demeanour less likely to attract attention. Poor Victor thought nothing of all this. He had forgotten for the time all business, and appointments, and constituents, and only knew what had happened that morning, and that he was very unhappy and had made others so. But, if he committed a breach of duty as a public man in thus idling away his time, his error did not go unpunished, for a step came near him, and he looked up, and he saw Minola Grey. He had just been saying to himself again and again, as one who is stamping a resolve down into his mind—"Come what will, let anyone suspect what he likes, I must not see her any more." He was thinking with a certain grim satisfaction of the probability of his soon getting some colonial appointment, and of the quickness with which he would leave England; and when he could not help asking himself how poor little Lucy would like such exile from her family and her friends, he answered firmly that anything would be better than the chance of seeing Minola Grey. And now he looked up and Minola Grey was there before him, and saw him.

He had stayed too long in that place. For Minola, leaving Lucy with a heart bursting to be relieved from the restraint that was on it, had remembered just as she was in the street that if she went any way in the direction of the House of Commons she might very possibly meet Victor Heron, or at least Mr. Money. So she turned away, and made up her mind to go through the Park and out into Waterloo Place, and home to the West Centre by that way.

She was close upon Victor before she saw him, and

they saw each other at the same moment. So much change had been made for both of them by that one glance from each in the morning, that it did not seem possible to Minola to make any attempt at mere acquaintanceship and casual conversation any more. She had no time to think; she did not well know what she was doing; but she was passing Heron without a single word, or more than a scared and startled look.

An instant before, Victor had made up his mind that, come what would, he must not meet her any more. Yet, by a strange inconsistency, he was made angry by her attempt to pass him without a word. He resented it as though it were a casting of deliberate scorn on him. For the moment he almost looked on Minola as one might look on an accomplice who turns away from his friend in some hour of trial.

He leaped from his seat and went towards her, and prevented her from going any farther.

"Are you not going to speak to me?" he asked.

She stopped and looked down, and tried to seem composed. A woman seldom so loses her sense of the proprieties of things as not to keep in mind the fact that there are people likely to pass by and take account of unusual demeanour. Minola saw, too, that Victor Heron was not in a mood to remember that or anything else just then, and that for his sake and hers she must give some way to his humour. She was trying to compose herself to this, when he repeated his question.

"What shall I say, Mr. Heron?" she asked gently, and in a tone of subdued remonstrance. "I don't see

any use in anything I can say; it is all so very unhappy."

It was strange how they both assumed the reality of the discovery that each had made. It was curious how each assumed that in the other's mind was a clear understanding of the meaning of every word. There was no supposed need of explanation. Between two natures alike so candid there was not the faintest attempt at any fencing off the reality.

Victor turned the way she was going and walked by her side. She had no power to prevent him, and was only somewhat relieved to find that they were going on.

There was silence for a moment or two; then Victor spoke.

"We are very unfortunate," he said; and there seemed to Minola something almost terrible in the simple acknowledgment of companionship involved in the little monosyllable "we."

"We are, indeed," she said, accepting the companionship as an acknowledged reality.

"It was all my fault," he said; "I was a fool—a blind and foolish idiot. I only wish that I alone had to suffer for it. I do, indeed."

"I am sure you do," Minola said. She knew him too well to doubt that it must be an added pain to him, things being as they were, that she should feel for him as he felt for her.

"You blame me for all this, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, no! I don't blame anyone; yes, I blame myself, but only for allowing anyone to know—it would not have been so bad, only for that." She stopped; she feared she had said too much.

"How long have you known of this?" Victor asked. He walked slowly by her side, and looked, not at her, but down at the dusty path. It was curious how both spoke without any distinct reference to the matter of which they talked. All that was assumed between them. Between them now, as between the brother and sister in Goethe's tragedy, was to be only the truth. That was the necessity of their condition.

"This long time; I don't know how long, but very long," she answered. There was something peculiarly pathetic in the simple humility of her answer.

A groan came from Victor. A long time—and he had never known anything or thought of anything until lately, but rushed headlong on like a blind fool.

"Then all might have been well if I hadn't been a fool and a madman!" He struck the point of his walking-cane fiercely at the ground, as if he were stabbing at some enemy—himself, perhaps.

Minola plucked up heart to say something, which she thought she ought to say.

"I don't know, Mr. Heron; I am afraid it would not have been much better—somebody would have had to suffer. There is—there is Lucy, you know; we must not forget her."

"Yes, yes," he said, "we must not forget her; it is not any fault of hers."

"Oh, no!"

"But when you knew this," he said, suddenly looking into Minola's face for the first time during this curious promenade, "why did you go on as if you never could like anyone in the world? How was I to know? Good God! it never occurred to me to think that a woman like you could care for a man like me

—in that sort of way. Do you remember when I told you one day, long ago, that I had a goddess-theory about women? Do you remember my saying anything like that to you one day?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Heron, quite well!”

“That was true enough,” he said, with a sort of smile. “I did think of women like that. I thought of you as if you were a goddess, Miss Grey; and I did not believe it possible that such a woman as you could care about me. I was quite grateful when I found that poor little Lucy was foolish enough to think about me; I was, indeed. But why did you play at being a hater of men and all that? Why did you deceive me? You should not have stooped to any such follies. I knew you didn’t really hate men or hate anybody; I knew you were a great deal too good for that; but I did believe you were not a girl to care about any of us, in that way.”

“I am sorry for any affectation of any kind; I don’t suppose any good ever came of it; but I did believe that my feelings were like that, at one time.”

“But when you found that they weren’t, then why did you keep up such a pretence any more?” He remonstrated in the earnest way of one who believes that he has been heavily wronged.

“I will tell you—I will tell you all the truth. I suppose we ought not to speak in this way at all; I suppose it is like a treason to Lucy, and to all our friends; I feel now almost like a traitor. But this is only for once, Mr. Heron, and to settle all; and perhaps we shall both be better, and see our way the clearer for having said this—although I came into this place only because I was afraid that if I went the

other way I might meet you—and see how things happen!”

She felt ashamed to go on; it was as if they were culprits. He, too, felt humbled to think that she should have had to try to avoid him.

“Well,” he said, “you may as well speak out now the whole truth, and let us know once for all; I wish we had been a little more outspoken before this, both of us.”

For the moment, in his pain, he seemed to forget that only he could have spoken out, and that he had not known truly what he would have until it was too late.

“No, it would have been of no use,” Minola said simply; “at least, somebody would have had to suffer. The truth is this, Mr. Heron: Lucy told me long ago all that she felt, poor child. She trusted all her secret to me; what could I do after that, but try at least to keep my own? You do not suppose I was to go round the world—our little world, I mean—as the girl who was in love, and whom nobody cared about?” There was a natural touch of the “Miss Misanthrope” in Minola as she spoke these words.

“Then this was why you seemed to dislike people—because of that?”

“I didn’t see anything else to do.”

They walked on a few steps in silence.

“It’s all hopeless now,” Victor said.

“Hopeless as far as that goes, but not hopeless otherwise for you, Mr. Heron. You will be very happy some time.”

He turned upon her almost angrily.

“Do you call that happy,” he asked, “to be mar-

ried to a woman I don't love, and to know that I might have married the woman I do love, and to know that it is all my own fault, and that I have done as much wrong and brought as much unhappiness to one as to the other? Do you think that is a prospect for a man to look out to, and be happy? I wish to Heaven I had been killed in any of these trumpery affairs out there!" He tossed his head impatiently and contemptuously, as indicating the St. Xavier's Settlements, and the slight esteem in which he held his colonial career now. "I wish to God I had been killed there and forgotten before I ever saw her face or yours!"

The intensity of his tone when he spoke the word "forgotten" might have served as an indication of his character, for one of the passionate dreams of his youth and his manhood had been that his name should be remembered somehow, as that of a man who had done good work in the service of England. It may be that if he had had less of that sort of manly ambition he might have better understood how to see his way in the more familiar trials of character. That ambition had supplied for him the place of the dreams of love, and of loving women, and of romance, and all the rest of it; and when the new feelings—new to him—came at last, he did not understand them as a commonplace young man would have been sure to do.

Minola listened to him quietly, and let him speak all he cared to say just then. She answered after a while:

"Oh, no, Mr. Heron, I don't mean that; I don't mean that you could help feeling this for a while. But you will grow reconciled after a little time; and you know how Lucy deserves to be loved—anyone must

love her, I think; and then you will have a career and success; and the lives of men are so full and so active, and you have so many things to think of; while we——”

She stopped. She did not care to utter the immemorial lament, the ever true, ever pathetic, pitiful lament, over the narrowness of woman's life, that was wailing in her heart at that moment—on that bright spring day in pleasant St. James's Park.

But the words touched Victor profoundly. He turned away from thoughts of self to her.

“It's true,” he said; “I suppose we have the best of it always; I was thinking of the shame that all this is to me. You don't feel that; you have done wrong to no one.”

“I don't know,” Minola answered sadly; “I think I am doing wrong in speaking of all this to you; I think I must have done some wrong when that can come to be possible, and when it seems the best thing left to do. I am Lucy's friend; she trusted all her secret to me—and now——”

“There is nothing to be done,” Heron said moodily. As if it were possible to think of anything that could be done!

“Nothing, except to make the best of what is; and for you to make her happy, and to be a success; and to go back to the House of Commons now;” she tried to speak in a firm and cheery tone.

“I can't even ask you to remember me——”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Heron! why not? If you think it likely that I should forget how kind you were and what a friend, then ask me to remember you by all

means. I shall remember you whether you ask me or not."

"And you," he asked, looking round at her, "do you ask me to remember you?"

"No; you will remember me, I know—why should you not? We shall have to meet again sometimes, I suppose, and why should we not be friends?"

He understood her this time. She was making a determined effort to replace their relation to each other on the basis of friendship. She had said all she meant to say about other feelings, and how they came to be felt in vain. He respected her decision, as indeed he now respected all she said or did. Up to that time they had both spoken with a certain shamefacedness and contrition, as if both alike were conscious of degradation in their strange and chance confidence. From the time when she spoke these words they both became calmer, and looked around with less sense of humiliation.

A hurrying step was heard behind them. Victor stopped and turned round. "How is it with me when every noise appals me?" How is it with us when we start at a hurried step on the path behind us? This was a very harmless intruder. It was a poor woman who had picked up something, with which she was hastening after Minola. As Victor stopped and she came up with him first, she spoke to him in good-natured breathlessness—

"It's the handkerchief, sir, the lady dropped—your good lady; I saw it on the walk, and I said to my husband, It belongs to the gentleman or his wife." She handed the kerchief to Victor, delighted to have been of any service to anyone.

Minola heard the well-meant words as well as Victor. She could not keep the colour from her cheeks; but she took the kerchief and was able to thank the poor woman in coherent words, and even with a bright smile.

They only walked a few yards on together. At the first turning to which they came Minola stopped.

"Good-bye, Mr. Heron; I am going this way." She did not give her hand.

"Good-bye," he said; and then came towards her and held out his hand. She put hers in his; there was a formal farewell—no pressure which either might feel; they did not allow their eyes to meet this time. Then he went his way and she went hers, neither at the moment knowing or thinking whither the ways led; and that was all, and all was over.

CHAPTER XII.

"Lean'd her breast up till a Thorn."

MR. MONEY and Victor Heron walked home that night together from the House of Commons. It was more than half an hour after midnight when they left the House, but both considered themselves getting off rather well so early as that, and neither loved going to bed at prudent and wholesome hours. Victor walked with Money to the door of the Victoria Street house, and then Money asked him to come in that they might talk a little. "There are two or three things I want to talk about," he said, "and we are sure to have a quiet hour now." Victor was willing, and Money brought him up to his study, where a fire was looking very cheery, although the spring was a little advanced, and there were cigars and other preparations for making a quiet hour pass agreeably.

"I like this time of night," Money said, "because one is sure to be let alone. There can't be any people wanting to see one now; and there are no newspapers and no letters, and all the house is in bed. This is about the only time of the day when I really feel that I am my own master. Come, take a cigar; there's Apollinaris and anything you like."

Victor sat down and began to smoke, and they fell to talking for a while about things in the House,

and the debate on Victor's great question, which was soon to come off.

"By the way," Money said suddenly, "and before I forget, I saw our friend, your rival, to-day—Sheppard, you know; and he had something to say to me that I want to ask your opinion about, although perhaps it ought to be a sort of secret as yet. What would you think of him as a husband for our friend Miss Grey?"

Victor almost started. He looked up so suddenly that Money followed unconsciously the direction of his eyes, fancying perhaps he had seen some unexpected sight.

"Did you think you heard some one stirring?" Money asked.

"No, I didn't. Well, about Sheppard?"

"What would you think of him, I was saying, as a husband for Minola Grey?"

Heron blew several straight puffs of smoke from his cigar before he answered. When he did speak his answer was not encouraging. "Absurd," was the remark he made.

Money smiled.

"Well, I should have thought so too, perhaps; but I believe there is something to be said for the idea after all. This man Sheppard came to me in rather a frank and straightforward way to-day, and asked me straight out to give him the help of my influence in persuading Miss Grey. He did propose for her before. Did you know that?"

"No, I did not."

"Nor I, although I dare say my women-folk did. Oh, yes, he told me candidly that he had proposed

for her not only once but twice, or more often perhaps!"

"Yes; and she—what did she say?" Victor seemed to have some difficulty about his cigar; apparently it required tremendous puffing to keep it alight.

"That's a bad cigar, I think, you have got hold of; an odd thing, too, in that box. Throw it away; have another."

"No, thanks; this is all right. Well, what did she say?"

"Well, of course, you know, we may easily infer what she said when, after his having pressed her in that sort of way, she is not Mrs. Sheppard yet."

"Oh!" A kind of groan broke from Victor at the bare idea of Minola being Mrs. Sheppard. "I can't imagine how any man can persecute a girl in that way," he went on indignantly. "I think he ought to be kicked; if I were the brother of a girl like that I would kick him, by Jove!"

"Yes, just so, and perhaps the girl would not thank her brother in the least for his kindly intervention. My dear fellow, have you never heard that in such things nineteen naysays make one grant? It's all very well for you good-looking fellows, with a sort of conquering, careless air about you, who find the girls only too glad when you ask them—it's all very well for you to talk about not persecuting girls. But a man like Sheppard must press his case a little or he will have no chance at all. He isn't by any means a bad-looking fellow either, but he has not the way that takes women; he must be content to ask, perhaps, and ask again. I have a good deal of sympathy for fellows like Sheppard."

"Well, but what does he want? He has asked Miss Grey, and she refused him—I should think so; what does he want now?"

"To ask again and not to be refused, I suppose."

"But what can you do for him?"

"He thinks that if I were to see the thing as he does, and to speak to Miss Grey about it, and advise her to think it over as favourably as she could, it might perhaps have some influence on her. You see, it's all very well just now while she is young, but she must grow tired some time or other of the kind of lonely life she leads, and she will not make new friends, and we are all in a manner breaking up. Theresa will be married very soon, and then Lucelet of course; and when the girls are married, I think sometimes of leaving England, Victor, my boy."

This was said with an air of carelessness, but, at the same time, Mr. Money closely watched Heron's face to see how he took the announcement. Victor certainly did look surprised.

"What on earth do you think of doing that for?"

"Well, you know my interests in a money way are much more in other countries than in this. In Russia, for instance, I have found people in authority to appreciate the things I do in a way that the people here never did. As long as the girls remained unmarried, of course, I should never have thought of that; but now, thank God, they are both going to be married in the happiest way, and my wife does not care for this country any more than I do, and one could often see one's children—a journey is nothing in our days—and on the whole I don't think I am much longer for England if things go as I expect. But there's time

enough to talk about that," and he seemed a little relieved for having got even so far. "The thing I wanted to speak to you about now is this business of our friend Sheppard. You don't like the idea?"

"The thing seems to me absurd and preposterous. He is a slow, formal, dull sort of Philistine, and to marry him to such a girl—good heavens! how could you think of it?"

Victor Heron jumped up in his usual excitable way, and began to walk up and down the room.

"Look here," he said, stopping suddenly, "how should you like the idea of your own daughter—either of your daughters—being married to a man she cared nothing about, and had refused again and again? Put it in that light."

"But, my good fellow, a girl like that must marry some one. She can't help herself. She is handsome and clever, and she has some money, and fellows will get around her, and the more generous she is the more easily she will be imposed upon. That fellow Blanchet has been trying hard to get her to fall in love with him. I'd rather trust her happiness a thousand times to a man like Sheppard than to a fellow like that. And, do you know?—our friend St. Paul actually fell in love with her—downright in love—and wanted her to marry him, and offered as a proof of his sincerity that she should begin by handing over every sixpence she has to little Mary Blanchet."

Heron flung himself down in his seat again, to give due ear to this revelation.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"St. Paul himself came and told me; he said she

was the only girl he ever could have cared about, and that he would have given her money enough to make ducks and drakes of in any benevolent projects she liked. Confess, Heron, that there must have been something tempting in that—at least, there would have been to most girls. St. Paul, after all, is the son of a duke and the brother of a duke, and a clever girl might have hoped to cure him of all his nonsense, and bring him to terms with his people again, and get him back into society, and get herself there along with him. I tell you what—my wife is a terrible Radical and all that, and yet I am not by any means certain that if such an offer had been made to one of our girls a year or so back she would not have been delighted at the chance. But our friend Minola would not hear of it."

This was trying news to Victor. He knew only too well, because only too late, why Minola refused every love offer that could be made.

"According to all established ideas," Money said, "the girl ought to have been in love with some one else; but that is not so, I suppose, in this case. It seems that she knew no one in Keeton but this poor Sheppard. He tells me that she told him she was in love with nobody but a man in a book—that was while she was in Keeton; and here in London she only knew just the two or three fellows we have now been talking about; and so far as I can see she has refused them everyone in turn. There's positively no one left but you, Victor, and I suppose you never proposed for her?" Mr. Money smiled good-humouredly.

"No," Victor replied; "I never proposed for her."

"The right man has not come along, I suppose; but the question is, will he ever come?"

"Suppose he never comes?" Victor said, with sudden energy and jumping from his seat again. "Suppose he never comes, what then? It would be a thousand times better for a girl like that to live alone—yes, and die alone—than to marry a man she did not love, and to have to drag through life with that sort of man or with any man she did not care for in the right way. She is too good for him; she is too good for anyone, for that matter; but to marry him would be a shame. Don't have anything to do with it, Money! Think of your own daughters. How would you like to have Lucy married to a man she did not care for?"

"That would not be the worst," Money said. "There might be much worse than that. It might be Lucelet's chance—thank God, it isn't—not to be able to love anyone in that sort of way, and yet she might marry some good fellow, and make him a good little wife, and be happy in the end. No; it isn't that I should dread for Lucelet so much. It would be her marrying a man who did not really and truly love her."

Money said all this in a thoughtful, almost dreamy sort of way, holding his cigar in his hand the while. He spoke as one might speak of a danger which exists no longer, but of which he can hardly think even yet without a certain drear impression; and he ended with a sigh of relief.

"She is saved from that, my boy, thanks to you," he said, and he stretched out his hand to Heron, who was near him at the moment, pacing up and down in his still unquelled excitement.

Heron felt his heart torn with pain and shame. He hardly knew how to take that outstretched hand.

He seemed as if he were driven along to say, "It's not true; I don't deserve your confidence, and you and your daughter ought to hate me." What might have come of the impulse no one can know, for just at that moment the attention of Mr. Money was suddenly drawn away.

"I certainly heard some one stirring outside the door there," he said; "odd, that. I thought everyone was in bed long ago. Stop a moment, Heron; I will go and see."

He went to the door and opened it. Heron was hardly even listening to his words.

"Why, it's Lucelet!" Money exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here, you little creature, at this time of night? Look here, Victor, here's a little eaves-dropper."

He came into the room, bringing with him the palpitating and rather affrighted little Lucy. She blushed crimson red at being thus caught, and finding that Victor was with her father.

"Oh, no, papa—for shame to say such a thing! I was not eaves-dropping; I was only listening to be sure that you were alone. At first I thought you were; and then I heard you talking, and I did not know who was with you, and I listened just for one moment, in order to be sure."

"You did not think it was Victor who was with me, I dare say?"

"No; at least, I didn't think so at first."

Lucy still looked embarrassed and alarmed. It must be owned that Victor Heron did not seem quite at his ease. Money was considerably amazed, for he had never had a visitation of this kind before.

"Take a seat with us, Lucy," Victor said at last, "since you have paid us a visit." He handed her a chair. She looked at him timidly and only said, "Thank you, Victor," but did not sit down. Her father put his hands on her shoulders and scrutinised her with a manner of good-humoured authority.

"So you have not been in bed at all, Lucelet? But that isn't anything very new for you to sit up too late. But what did you want, pray, in this part of the building at this hour? Think of the possible shock to our nerves, you foolish young person. Suppose we had fancied we saw a ghost and expired of fright?"

Lucy smiled a rather wan smile.

"I wanted to speak to you, papa, and I thought I would sit up until you came in—it wouldn't be very late, perhaps; and then I heard you come, and I was not quite certain if you were alone, and after a while I came down to try."

"Was it such very important business, Lucelet, that it would not keep until to-morrow? and must it be told to me in solemn seclusion and at the dearest hour of night?"

"I thought I should like to see you by yourself, and when you were not likely to be disturbed——"

"Likely to be disturbed by anyone but yourself, you mean, I suppose, Lucelet?"

Lucelet somehow had no mirth in her to-night. She still looked scared and uneasy, and unlike herself.

"You have been to the House, Victor?" she said, as if she would turn the conversation away from herself.

Before Victor could answer, Money struck in:

"Confess, Lucelet," he said, with something like

gravity of tone, "that you expected Victor here; and that that was the reason why you came stealing down to our midnight conference?"

She shook her head.

"No, indeed, dear; it was not that. I did not expect to find Victor here."

"And I ought not to be here," Victor said, "at such an hour as this. You want to talk to your papa, Lucy, and I must not interrupt you." He seemed as if about to go.

"Oh, it's nothing!" Money said. "Can't it be told before Victor, Lucelet—or can't it wait just a little? We were talking of something that would greatly interest you, I know, when you came in; and since you have given us the benefit of your company at a time when you ought to be in bed, I don't object at all to taking you into our council. Do you, Victor?"

"Oh, no, if Lucy would not rather speak to you now alone. I can come in to-morrow, and we can talk of the other matter——"

"I think when Lucelet hears what it is, she will not be inclined to put it off for any business of her own. It is about Miss Grey, Lucelet."

Lucy looked up with a start, and the colour came again into the face that was pale a moment before.

"About Nola? You have something to say about Nola?"

"Yes, we have. Will you come into council, Lucelet?"

"I don't know—if you wish, yes; what is it about?"

"No, no; it would be cruelty," said Victor resolutely. "It is clear that Lucy is too tired for much

consultation; and as she has stayed up for a particular purpose, she ought not to be interfered with. No, thank you, Money; I'll not stay now. It's quite time for me to go."

Lucy made no attempt to induce him to stay. Money looked at her and then at Victor in some surprise.

"Good-night, Lucy," Victor said.

"Good-night, Victor." She put her little cold and tremulous hand into his, and she looked up at him. There was such an expression in her eyes as made Victor's heart thrill with pain. Their eyes met for a moment, and her look was full of unhappiness. There was no complaint in it; there was no angry protest against man, or fate, or heaven, or anything; only such settled unhappiness as one might have thought that young and pretty face could never be made to show. As she looked into his face, and her hand was still held in his, a tear began to gather in the child-like soft eyes, and the little lips began to quiver. She withdrew her hand quickly but not ungently.

Victor was going; Money rose to accompany him to the door, but Victor saw Lucy put her hand upon her father's arm as if to detain him; and he at once insisted that Money must not leave his room. As Heron went out and closed the door behind him, he heard Money say to his daughter:

"Why, Lucelet, my dear, what is this all about?"

Victor hastened away lest he might hear any more. He felt miserably unhappy. He felt conscience-stricken, although it might have puzzled a casuist to say where there could be found anything to blame in any part of his conduct in which Lucy was concerned. It is much

to be feared, however, that in real life only those feel the stings of conscience much who have done little to deserve the torture. In the realms of poetry and art, indeed, conscience may "call her furies forth to shake the sounding scourge and hissing snake," and may show "what lesson may be read beside a sinner's restless bed." But in ordinary life the sounding scourge is usually only for the sensitive skin of the man or woman who is always trying to do right, and the regular sinner sleeps a sleep of infantile depth and sweetness. For Victor Heron, although it was not certain that poor Lucy's melancholy eyes had anything to do with him at all, there was little sleep that night. "Conscience, anticipating time," in the lines from which we have just quoted, "already rues the unacted crime." In Heron's case, conscience rued a wrong which it never had been in Heron's heart to do.

CHAPTER XIII.

"And even for Love will bury Love in Earth."

WHEN Minola made that sudden confession to Mary Blanchet which was told in a former chapter, she did it under the impulse of a feeling which she could no more restrain than she could explain it. After it was done she was sorry, perhaps, that she had made the confession, but she had no fear that it would be betrayed. Devoted as Mary was to her brother, Minola felt certain that she would never let one word of such a secret escape from her to him; and Minola did not even consider the possibility of her telling it to anyone else. They hardly spoke of it afterwards. Minola only once impressed on Mary the necessity of keeping it the profoundest secret, which, to do the poetess justice, was hardly necessary. If there was one obligation which Mary respected above all others, it was the confidence of a woman's love-secret. She became, if possible, more devoted than ever to her leader; first, because the leader had proved herself a very woman by having a love-secret, and, next, because Minola had confided the secret to her. Mary did not ask who the hero of the secret story might be. She easily got to know that Mr. St. Paul was not the person; because by questions and by inferences she came to understand that he had really offered himself for the place, and had not been accepted. This was a subject of

immense delight and pride to Mary. In her wildest dreams of day or night she had never hoped for such an honour as to have a friend who had refused the son of a duke. No matter about the character of the duke's son; no matter if he was cast off by his own family and his own class; all the same he was the son of a duke—nothing could alter that. He, then, being out of the way, it was not, perhaps, very difficult for the astute Mary to guess at the real person; and it did indeed seem to her a great misfortune for her leader to have fallen into an attachment so hopeless as that must be. Still, the sympathies of Miss Blanchet were always rather with hopeless than with hopeful attachments. Minola became in her eyes only all the more interesting, all the more beautiful, all the more womanly and queenly, because of this unhappy love.

One great advantage Minola gained by her sudden outburst of confession was that Mary ceased from that time forth to tell her of her brother's love and disappointment. But Minola did not know that Mary grew rather more hopeful about her brother than before. Since Miss Grey absolutely could not marry the man she loved, there was all the more chance that she might resign herself to marry some one who at least loved her. When Victor Heron was married once for all, then, perhaps, Mary thought, Minola might begin to reconcile herself to realities. Herbert Blanchet's chance might come then after all.

Meanwhile a marked change for the better was coming over Blanchet himself. He really had been awakened, as a certain class of pious person might say, to a sense of the goodness that was in life and in some human hearts. He had had these feelings stirred

within him for the first time by Minola's spontaneous kindness. He fell in love with Minola, and he grew ashamed of himself, and the pitiful affectations of his life. He asked her to love him, and he was refused, as we know, but very kindly and considerately. Minola showed, perhaps, only too much consideration for his feelings. She assured him that she had no intention to marry, and that in any case she could not say she felt for him any of the sentiments he professed to feel for her. He went away not without hope, and he set himself to work to redeem his life from the reproach of idleness. Mrs. Money, as we know already, took him lately under her special care as helper of unhappy men. Perhaps she guessed well enough what were his pains and his hopes. He went to see her often, at hours, as she took care it should be, when Minola was not likely to be there. Mrs. Money grew more and more fond of him as she helped him on, and perhaps thought it would not be a bad thing for either if in the end Minola came to marry him. "The dear child must marry some one in the end," Mrs. Money took for granted, and, as she had means enough of her own, why might she not marry this handsome and gifted young fellow? Why might she not come to love him? Of all these ideas Mrs. Money communicated none to her husband, for she knew that he had ideas of his own on the same subject which were not the same as hers. For once, Mr. and Mrs. Money were, as regarded a girl's settlement in life, almost as much divided as Mr. and Mrs. Page. Under the influence of her ideas, however, Mrs. Money was determined to extend a helping hand to the poet. She induced her husband to exert his influence so far on Blanchet's be-

half as to recommend him to some newspaper editors whom Mr. Money knew, and to obtain for his talents as a writer of light and brilliant articles a chance of success and pay. The poet went to work very steadily. He joined with a literary friend to take chambers in the Temple; he renounced poetry for the present, until he should have shown that he really had in him a capacity for hard work, and until some inspiration should arise compelling him to attempt a poem, and therefore proving him a man of at least poetic calling. In truth, the meaning of all this was that Blanchet was disappointed, was penitent, was disposed to blame himself for his failure hitherto—another and very subtle and satisfying mood of self-conceit—and that he was ready to plunge from extreme of self-indulgence to extreme of self-restraint.

In all this, however, he was working still with a purpose and a hope. He had in his life experienced most things except prosperity. He had fallen on bad chances and into a bad school for a petulant and fitful nature like his. He had been left for the most part to a companionship which had little regard for the manly virtues of character. He had consoled himself for disappointments and failures by wrapping himself in a ragged mantle of self-conceit, and affectation, and cynicism. It was easier to talk and think with scorn of an unappreciating world than to work patiently to deserve appreciation. The break-down of all this, his strong love for Minola and her generous kindness, together wrought on him so as to dispose him for more wholesome struggles and a fresh life. His self-conceit now worked in a new form. He was strongly persuaded that Minola was only trying what he could do

in the way of manly struggle and achievement before she listened to him, and he told himself that the present was, after all, only a period of probation.

Once he allowed some hope of this kind to escape him in talking with his sister, and she did not wholly discourage it. Some faint whisper, some half-breathed, unconscious utterance of hers, filled him, however, with a terrible suspicion. He had never before thought of the possibility of Miss Grey loving anyone if she did not love him. He always complacently regarded her as he regarded fame, as something which, perhaps, has to be wooed amid disappointments, and which may not come all at once or without trouble, but which was sure to be his portion when he had exerted himself enough to deserve it. The new suspicion breathed so unconsciously into his mind by poor Mary filled it with a strange power. It held him day and night. It turned him suddenly and almost completely from his steady work of self-improvement. He felt that he could do nothing until he was clear upon that point, and he set himself to watch and find out.

There never could have been a sermon against suspicion and against mean watchfulness half so impressive as the sum total of what his suspicions and his spyings cost Herbert Blanchet, if he only could have known it. Minola had heard of his steady work from Mrs. Money as well as from Mary, and she was glad of the improvement, and felt a higher respect for him because he had not allowed himself to be wholly crumpled up by a disappointment in love. When all was first known between her and Victor Heron, she felt so miserable and so guilty, that she could have found it in her heart to wish she had married anyone,

or gone to the other end of the world, or drowned herself, rather than have Lucy and Heron and herself entangled in such a miserable web of perplexity, and of something like deceit.

One dim, foggy evening, when spring seemed to have suddenly turned back into winter, Minola sat in her room, drearily touching some chords on her piano, and meanwhile asking herself, "What is to be done now? what is to come next?"

"One thing is to be done," she said, speaking aloud and rising from the piano. "I am going out, Mary."

"Isn't it wet and foggy, dear?" Mary asked. Mary never saw any use in going out when the weather was not very fine.

"I don't care, Mary; I'll battle with the elements. Is not that the heroic way of putting it?"

"I suppose so; I wish I were a hero, dear."

"What has become of your poetry, Mary? Your poems ought to be your heroism."

"What has become of them, dear? Oh, I don't know! What has become of everything?"

"Yes," Minola said, in irrepressible despondency; "I wonder what has become of everything we cared about, Mary? I wonder what will become of you and me?"

Mary sighed.

"Oh, you are well enough, Minola dear! you have youth and beauty and everything; and you could do so much good and make people happy, and by making them happy you would be happy yourself."

There was silence for a moment or two.

"How is your brother, Mary?" Minola asked abruptly.

"He is very well, dear," Mary said, looking up timidly. "I think he is very well; he does not complain of anything. He is working very hard, and he tells me it does him good, and he seems very hopeful, I think."

"I am very glad to hear it; indeed I am, Mary," Minola said in an almost penitent tone; and then she made preparations for what she called battling with the elements.

She went her usual way through the Park, thinking sadly enough of the first days when she knew that walk, and when she was full of the joy of her newly-acquired independence. It seemed to her, knowing all that had passed in that short interval, as if no human creature could have shown herself less fitted for independence than she. She began to be sick of her purposeless life, which had, so far as she saw, only brought distress on herself and on her friends. A woman of the world would have thought little of all that had passed—would have thought, perhaps, that nothing that could be called anything had passed. But Minola's proud spirit and sensitive conscience had not been subdued or seared by the ways of the world. She had tried the past chapters of her life, and she had condemned them; and from her own sentence there was no appeal.

Soon Miss Misanthrope stood on the bridge that spans the canal, her favourite spot. She had come there for quiet and for thought. The day had been wet and foggy, so much so that at one time it seemed impossible for her to get out of doors at all, and she dreaded a whole day caged up with Mary Blanchet—

at least, until she had made up her mind on a question of deep moment to her. But the rain ceased to stream and was succeeded by a thick, warm fog, and Minola did not heed the fog; and so she started for her solitary walk. By the time she had crossed the park the fog was beginning to lift, and when she stood on the bridge she saw a curious and a very lovely sight. On the canal, across it, all along its banks for a certain distance, the heavy, damp fog brooded. It brooded thick, and soft, and dank, as though the season were early winter instead of late spring rapidly melting into summer. It was rather late in the evening; the appearance of the scene was for a certain distance around rather that of a November night than of a spring evening, however late. But high up in the heavens, above the region of the fog, the sky was clear, was all of a faint delicate blue, and the moon was now bright. Immediately beneath Minola's feet, in the water, the reflection of the moon was brilliant, and the sluggish ripples were glorified in its light. Yet if she allowed her gaze to follow the canal, though but a very little way, she came on the fog-bank and the region of the mist again. So, if she raised her eyes slowly from the canal to the sky, she saw in succession of almost imperceptible change the murky hue of the water in the fog, the blackish grey of the spectral trees seen dimly through it, and then shades of softening grey, until in some manner which the gazer could not clearly make out the grey had all given way to the pale blue, and at last, following the lighting heaven to the source of light, she reached the glittering effulgent yellow in which the moon was circled. A strange and beautiful condition of atmosphere and sky thus brought the fogs

and chilly waters of November and the soft blue skies and mild moonlight of May into one picture.

The picture had this effect upon Minola, that it took her for the moment away from her own brooding troubles. It told her, too, that, come what would, the beauty of sky and water would remain a living possession for her. She began to wonder whether, after all, we do not exaggerate in our romantic or petulant moods those sorrows that are said to be especially of the heart. It seemed to her, under the softening and purifying influence of the scene around, that there was much left for her to do and to enjoy in life. Hers was a nature of that mould that is peculiarly alive to the influences of sky, and scene, and atmosphere—a nature that under other conditions of training would have been profoundly superstitious, and for which, to adopt the picturesque expression of Schiller, the door of the ghost-kingdom would easily open. Had she not been brought up in prosaic and well-informed England of the midland counties it is probable that the door of that ghost-kingdom would always have stood ajar for her, and that amid the commonplace work and joys of every day she would often have had sight of the vast lost regions of the supernatural—that Eden of fearful fascination from which man, by reason of his eating the fruit of the tree of science, has shut himself out. But, even as it was, she retained enough of the thrilling temperament that admits of superstition to feel peculiarly influenced, now encouraged, and now depressed, by the movement of a cloud, the gleam of a star, the sudden, unexpected ripple of water among concealing reeds. Therefore as she stood this night, and studied the picture all around her, she felt her

soul growing exalted, and saw the heavy mists of her personal troubles begin to roll away and show some gleam of brightness beyond.

When she came slowly away she was filled with a resolve. If it was not a very wise one, it was at least unselfish, and it was the result of the calmest thought she could take, alone and wholly uncounselled. She had clearly seen for some time that her first theory of life was all a failure. It had completely broken down. She brooded hopelessly over this mournful conviction for a while, and then, like all beings of healthy, unselfish nature, she began to ask herself what was to be done next? She could not give up all her life to grieving over the irreparable. It was not enough for her to sit down and cry because things had not gone well with her. Something must be done; what was to be done?

She could not remain in London and live this kind of life any more. It would be intolerable if she had to run the risk of meeting Victor Heron day after day. She knew well enough his sudden energy of nature, and she feared for him more than for herself that he might make some effort to break away from the pledge that as yet alone held him to poor Lucy. It seemed clear to Minola that in the miserable game of cross-purposes they had been playing they had left no way out except with unhappiness to some one. It was equally clear to her that Lucy ought not to be the sufferer. She did not doubt that time would soften or wholly remove the effect of his mistake and his disappointment for Victor Heron, and that he would come to love Lucy as she ought to be loved, and to be as happy as men can well expect to be. When a thing

is inevitable she knew that souls with any manhood in them will always make the best of it; and she well knew that Heron's was a soul filled with genuine manhood. The one thing, therefore, most needful to be done was to make the complete separation of herself and Victor inevitable.

At first she had ideas of going to live far away from England. She spent more than one musing hour in thinking on the place to be chosen for her retreat. She thought of the East, and was almost amused at the idea of her being another Hester Stanhope, for in her very childish days Hester Stanhope used to be a sort of heroine with her. She thought of Rome; and, indeed, her heart yearned for a life wholly given up to Rome. She thought of Athens; and she thought, too, of the fresh, new world across the Atlantic, where every new idea and every free assertion of individual energy is believed to have a fuller and fairer chance of justifying itself than here among us. But there came up amid all these dreamings the reflection that, after all, this would be doing little good for any mortal but herself. It would only be a sort of sensuality of the soul indulged to the full. It was then the thought rose in her mind that perhaps it was her duty to make some manner of sacrifice for the happiness of some one else. "I cannot be happy myself in my own way," she said to herself; "that is certain. Why should I not try to order things so that by some self-denial I may yet be the means of making some one else more happy than he might otherwise be?" How very happy she might make poor Mary Blanchet by marrying her brother! And Blanchet, too, who professed to love her so much—and who was surely quite sincere, for Minola had

lately learned to have great faith in the sincerity of human love—if she could make him happy, would it not be a better use to which to put her life than to moon it away in the indulgence of a vain lament for the unattainable? There were some gifts in him, and under favouring auspices they might shine into something really great. Why should she not apply her life to the task of endeavouring to give them a full development? It seemed to Minola that this would be a far better way of spending her youth than surrendering it wholly to solitude and her own indulgence in vain regret. One dread sometimes made her shudder at the idea. Suppose Victor Heron were to think that she never really had had any steady and enduring love for him? Suppose he set her down as a woman of no real heart, no strong emotion at all? But then came quick as a ray of light the conviction, "He will never think that;" and afterwards, in melancholy resignation, the reflection, "If he should, it is only all the better."

So she made up her mind. The resolve was an unwise one, no doubt. A girl who had known more of the world's ways would never have made it—at least, she would never have made it with such a purpose and such a hope. A woman of the world might have married for money when she could not get the man she loved; she would have married for a home, and a protector, and a settlement, and all the rest of it; and we should most of us have said that she did sensibly and well. She might have married to please her father and mother, as the good girls were always taught that it was their duty to do in the formal old days, and her filial piety would have been applauded. But the idea of marrying a poor young man without

even the excuse of loving him, the idea of marrying him merely because he loved her, and she thought she might do him good, and make his life happy; this would undoubtedly have seemed to all sensible persons not only very absurd, but perhaps rather unwomanly as well. Such, however, was the resolve Minola made, and it was made deliberately and in honest purpose for the right. In the perplexed way of her life she saw nothing better to do than this. This would secure the happiness of poor Lucy, who then would never know that her happiness had been in danger; it would make Heron's course clear and inevitable; it would perhaps make Blanchet happy; it would certainly make Mary very happy; and for Minola herself, it would at least give her the knowledge that her life was of some use to some human hearts. She came away from the park with a resolve. In that sense she was less unhappy than before.

"I will see Herbert Blanchet. I will trust to his honour and his generosity. I will tell him that I love—that I did love—a man whom I cannot marry; and, if he is willing to have me for his wife with that knowledge, I shall not hold back any longer."

"After all, perhaps I shall thus be acting out my part of Miss Misanthrope in the spirit and the letter," she said, with a gleam of her old humour, as she walked homeward.

"Mary, I should like to see your brother very much, and as soon as he could come," Minola said to her companion that evening, as they sat alone, and tried to get up an appearance of their old cheerfulness.

Mary looked up surprised.

"I am sure, Minola, he ought to be only too

delighted; but do you think it would be well to ask him to come?"

"Would it be any harm?"

"He feels such a great deal, you know; or, indeed, I don't think you could well know. There are feelings we can all only have for ourselves. I am afraid, Minola dear, it would only renew his unhappiness, poor fellow. He loves you so much, Minola."

Minola coloured and felt distressed. Almost her heart failed her, but she kept to her purpose.

"If I wanted to see him very particularly, Mary, don't you think he would come then?"

Mary looked up again in doubled wonder. A wild hope came into her mind which she would not dare to express, but which set her all trembling and brought the tears into her eyes.

"Oh, yes, Minola dearest, of course he would come! Of course he must know, as well as I know, that you would not bring him here to give him needless pain, and that you have some good purpose."

"I want to say something to him very particularly, Mary, which I think now I ought to say. I want to ask him something. I don't know how he will answer it; but I feel that I ought to give him the chance of answering it. Now, don't begin puzzling your head about it, Mary dear; you will know it all soon, whatever way things turn out; but at present, dear, it specially concerns him and me, and I could not tell even you, Mary, until I had spoken to him first."

Mary was a little cast down from her wild hopes. She feared that, after all, it was only some explanation Minola proposed to give to Herbert, with a view, per-

haps, of making him more reconciled to his fate, a result about which Mary had but little hope. She accepted her part, however, and promised to go and see her brother the very first thing in the morning.

It would be needless to deny that, in thinking over her project of self-sacrifice, Minola had thought of other names as well as that of Herbert Blanchet. She had thought, for instance, of her too faithful old lover, Mr. Sheppard; but she could not see the possibility of a life spent with Mr. Sheppard. She did not see that she could be of any manner of use to him in his career; rather, indeed, she felt that she must necessarily be something of a hindrance. Then there was no Mary Blanchet in that case to be joined in the objects of the sacrifice. Mr. Sheppard had money enough, and wanted no help in that way. Her money might enable Blanchet, she thought, to give his genius full sway—to give it its head, without regard to prudence, and publishers, and pot-boilers. “I suppose he has genius; I think he has genius,” she kept saying to herself. If she was to sacrifice herself—and this must in any case be an absolute sacrifice—she felt she must justify the act to her own heart and conscience by the assurance that it would do the fullest good in her power to do.

When Mary, full of doubt and hope, went to see her brother next morning, she was startled by the change that appeared to have suddenly taken place in him. He seemed to have thrown away his hard-working mood, and to be reckless and almost ferocious. When Mary told him she had brought him a message from Minola, he looked almost as if she had said she brought a warrant for his arrest.

"What does she want of me, Mary? You must know. Come, let us hear it; tell it out."

"But, Herbert dear, indeed I don't know. She did not tell me anything."

"And you don't guess, my sister?" he asked, with a sickly smile that made her uncomfortable to see.

"No, Herbert. She only said that she wanted to ask you a question, and that you ought to have a chance of answering it, or something of that kind."

"Yes, I thought so. Very well, Mary; tell her I will not go; tell her to think anything she likes of me—the very worst will not be too bad; but I will not see her."

He turned his back on his sister. Mary, however, had seen him in heroic and in despondent moods often enough not to feel quite discouraged by this demonstration. She endeavoured to argue with him; and ventured to hint that probably he might find everything turning out for the very best when he came to speak with Minola.

"You think so?" he asked, with a laugh. "Very well, Mary, I will go; it may as well be got done with once for all. Come, my sister, let us go. Are you to be present at the interview, Mary?"

"No, Herbert; oh, no! She wants to speak to you alone first. But I dare say I shall know some time."

"I dare say you will; I only wonder you have not known it already. Tell me, Mary; don't you think one had best tell the truth, when it is certain that he must be found out if he tells a lie?"

"Oh, Herbert, what a question!"

"You think it very absurd, don't you? Well, Mary, there is some sense in it, too. You may be sure I shall answer Miss Grey's question very truthfully to-day."

CHAPTER XIV.

Left Lonely.

THAT was a time of strange and painful emotion during which Minola waited for the coming of Blanchet and his sister. There were moments when she would have given all the world to be able to recall what she had said and done. There were even moments of agonising reaction, when she felt inclined to descend the stairs softly, and open the door, and go into the street, and disappear for evermore somehow from the sight of all who knew her. Once or twice she covered her face with her hands as if she felt an intolerable shame. Once or twice she burst into tears. She was only sustained by the thought that the extraordinary step she had resolved on would secure poor Lucy's happiness, and that it would make both Mary Blanchet and her brother very happy. Other way to make her wretched failure of a life useful to any human creature she saw none. She got up and walked about the room like some half wild and caged creature, whose limitations sometimes become almost unbearable. She was terrified at the fate she had brought upon herself; she looked back with miserable regret to the few free and happy days she had spent when she first came to London. "Let no wretched woman ever try to be independent!" she cried out in her bitterness.

What a long time they were in coming! for now

she began to wish that the interview were over, and anything resolved upon that could not be undone. Trifling little things came into her mind, and perplexed and distressed her. If, for instance, Mary Blanchet should remain in the room! "If she is there I shall not be able to say out what I want to say," Minola thought; "and if she wishes to remain, will she think it strange and wrong if I ask her not to stay? If it is all settled, how shall I have to behave to him? Will he understand that I am not going to play any love part? If he comes, and I tell him all this, and he is content, then will he kiss me, and must I seem willing to be kissed? Will he accept me at all on such terms? ——" A wild gleam of hope lit up within her for a moment, and then died out. "Oh, yes, he will accept me—he does not care!" she said; and she trembled with pain and shame at the strange humiliation she had brought upon herself. She will never forget the agony of that hour while she waited there alone.

At length they are come. She heard the voice of Mary apparently reasoning with Blanchet. Then one point of perplexity was presently settled for her, because the door opened and Mr. Blanchet came in, and he was alone. Minola heard the soft patter of Mary's receding feet. Then a sudden revulsion took place in her feelings, and she wished that Mary had come in with her brother. It was too late now, however, to think of that, for Blanchet was in the room unaccompanied, and came towards her.

Minola was greatly surprised and even shocked at the appearance of Blanchet. She would have been still more pained if she could have persuaded herself that his present aspect and manner were the result of

his love, and that she was to blame for having brought him to this pass. But there was something sullen and almost fierce about him which did not seem even to her inexperienced eyes to speak merely of the pangs of misprized love. He looked like a man who has come to meet an accusation and is determined to brazen it out. His very manner of saluting her had in it something of defiance which was strangely unlike his old ways of poetic devotion, when he used to place himself, metaphorically at least, at her feet, and look up to her as his patroness and saint.

Perhaps Minola now wished she had not sent for him. Perhaps her mind misgave her as to her purpose of self-sacrifice. Perhaps she would gladly have had Mary Blanchet or anyone else in the room, to bear her company.

She had sent for Mr. Blanchet, however, and she had to receive him becomingly. It seemed marvellous to her now how she ever could have invited him with the intention of offering herself to him to be his wife. Taking her courage, as the French phrase has it, in her two hands, she went to meet Herbert with a friendly greeting.

To her surprise Blanchet did not take her hand when she offered it, but made a bow, and placed himself at some distance from her, standing near the chimney-piece.

"I know why you have sent for me, Miss Grey," he said, "and I had better not take your hand until we understand one another. I am told by Mary that you wish to ask me a question. Well, let me save you trouble and myself too. I answer the question at once. I say yes—yes!"

Then the poet threw back his dark hair, and stood as one who cares not now what is to follow. If he had ever been a reader or a stage-struck admirer of Shakespeare, one might have supposed that the attitude and look were got up after Othello, when he says, "'Twas I that killed her," and is thenceforth prepared for the worst.

This was a mystery to Minola. It seemed absolutely impossible that he could have learned or guessed at the nature of the question she had meant to put to him. It had only been settled in her own mind the evening before, and was never whispered, even to the reeds along the canal. Nor even if he had known it by supernatural inspiration did his tone and manner seem appropriate to the occasion, and to the answer he had given.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Blanchet, and you can't, I think, have any idea of the reason why I asked you to come and see me."

"Yes, yes; I know it very well—only too well."

"Then you must tell me what it is; for, really, Mr. Blanchet, if you know it, I don't."

Minola seated herself quietly on a little sofa, and waited for him to explain all this. His theatrical ways were so absurd and offensive in her eyes that they impelled her to fall back upon a reserved and distant demeanour. He could hardly have gone mad, she thought; and in any case she now only wished to be well out of the whole affair. Minola could not believe that real emotion and stage-play could go together in the one part in private life, and she judged Blanchet wrongly for this reason. There are people in whom the instinct of the theatrical is as strong as the com-

mon instinct of self-preservation. Blanchet was as much in earnest now and as near to actual despair as he could be in this life.

"Oh, yes, I know!" he said, "and I may as well save you all trouble in reproaching me. You need not tell me you despise me, Miss Grey; you can't despise me more than I despise myself. You need not tell me I have been ungrateful; I know that there never was a more ungrateful wretch on earth. If you could care for any thanks from me or believe in their sincerity, I would thank you for one thing—for not telling poor Mary anything about this. It was like your magnanimous nature to do this. She will come to know of it some time, I suppose; but not from you—not from you."

Minola began to be really alarmed and shocked. This was no play-acting. His eyes were burning with wild emotion. He was in thorough earnest. Her idea was that he must have committed some crime and got it into his head that she knew of it. She got up and went kindly over to him. He shrank away.

"We are talking at cross-purposes, Mr. Blanchet; and I am afraid you are going to tell me something I ought not to know. You must not say any more—at least, without thinking of what you are saying. I have no reproach to make against you, Mr. Blanchet; what could I have? If you have done anything that deserves all the reproach you are giving to yourself, I don't know anything of it—and indeed I don't believe it."

"You don't know; you really don't know?" and his eyes lighted up with a momentary ray of surprise and hope. Then he became despairing again. "You are

sure to know before long; and I may as well tell you myself."

"No, no, Mr. Blanchet, I don't want to know; I have no right to know. Pray don't say any more—let us ask Mary to come in." He put his hand upon her arm and stayed her.

"No, no, you must hear it all now; we had better have an end to it. It concerns you, Miss Grey, and you have a right to know of it. 'Twas I who saw you and Heron in St. James's Park; it was I who told Lucy Money; and made you seem a treacherous friend to her; 'twas I who did mischief that I suppose can never be set right, and did it all to the only woman in the world who ever was really kind to me. Yes—what do you think of me now?"

Minola felt herself growing giddy and sick as he talked on in his wild way. Little as she understood of what he was saying, yet she knew enough to make her feel as if the ground reeled beneath her. It was enough that Victor and she had been seen and watched and misunderstood by somebody, and that all her efforts to make things happy for Lucy were in vain. For the moment she did not think of herself. She knew that there was nothing she had done to be ashamed of, or which two simple words to Lucy would not explain. But when that explanation once began, where was it to stop? For the moment she did not even think of the degradation to herself in having her movements watched, and reported, and misrepresented; or of the shameful ingratitude of Blanchet, whom, an hour ago, she almost looked upon as her destined husband.

Blanchet now stood leaning both his elbows on the chimney-piece, his head turned away from her.

"Mr. Blanchet," Minola said quietly, "you say you have done me some great wrong. There is just one favour you can do me now, and that is, to tell me in the simplest words what you saw, and what you said of it, and why you came to say it."

She stood and waited, with a manner seemingly of the most perfect composure. Within her breast all was pain, shame, anger, and distraction. But she contrived to keep an air of entire self-restraint and calmness. It appeared to her that the mere dignity of womanhood exacted from her that much of self-control at least.

Then Blanchet told his story. It was a little incoherent here and there, and dashed with theatric expressions of passion and despair. But its general purpose was only too clear. He was going to call on Mrs. Money that unhappy day, and as he was crossing the park he saw Victor Heron seated, and apparently waiting for some one. The poet confessed that, prompted by some demon of jealousy and suspicion, he watched, and he saw Minola come up, and he saw them meet and saw them walk together. Then, still and further inspired by the demon on whom he was disposed to throw so much responsibility, he hastened to Mrs. Money's house; he learned that Heron had left a full hour before Minola; he even found out that they had parted formally from each other; and then he told Lucy for her private information that he had just seen them together in the park, an hour after Heron had left Lucy declaring that he must hasten to the House of Commons.

Minola heard all this, bending her head slightly

every now and then to signify that she understood his meaning. At the end she quietly asked what Lucy had said to the story he told her.

She looked very pale, Blanchet said; but she only begged of him not to say anything to her mother, and then she went away. But he saw too well, he added, that she was struck to the heart by what she had heard. Then first, when his rage of jealousy and madness had passed away, he began to understand the full measure of his shame. When Minola sent for him—to ask him—to ask him a question, as Mary had told him—he felt sure it was to put the question of guilty or not guilty. He might as well plead guilty at once. It must all come out. There must be explanations, and he must stand confessed. That did not trouble him now, he said. His one only thought was that Minola had been his best friend in all the world, and that he had betrayed her.

Minola listened to these explanations with a heart in which scorn and anger were longing for utterance, but with serene and imperturbable composure. Once again she thought to herself, "Yes, it is true—women are born hypocrites;" and she thought, too, "I am glad of it just now."

"Things are not quite so bad as your excited conscience would make them out, I hope, Mr. Blanchet," she said, with a half smile of contempt. "It was not well done of you to play such a part, nor exactly what I should have expected; but I hope it will prove that you have not done much harm to anyone—except to your own feelings and conscience, of course. I met Mr. Heron by the merest chance that day in the park, and I never met him there or anywhere else except by

chance. That can be explained in two words if Miss Money thinks any explanation necessary. She will believe anything I tell her or that Mr. Heron tells her."

Blanchet shook his head.

"You think she will not believe him or me?" Minola asked, with quiet contempt. "Oh, yes, Mr. Blanchet, you are mistaken!"

"I didn't mean to doubt that," the poet said, with downcast head. To do him justice he had not the least doubt that either Minola or Heron would tell the truth; his doubt was whether the full acknowledgment would be entirely satisfactory to Lucy Money; and Minola guessed his meaning.

"That, at any rate, can be left to Miss Money's own judgment, Mr. Blanchet. I was only anxious to assure you that you have not after all done so much harm as you seemed to fear just now."

She looked very cold and cruel. As he turned his eyes to hers he caught no light of ancient kindness or pity in them; only a cold and merciless dislike and contempt. He cast one abject, penitent glance at her, a glance that seemed to implore for some merciful consideration.

"You don't even reproach me," he said, appealing to her with outstretched hands of sudden passion and despair.

"Oh, no! I have no right to complain of anything you may choose to say. You did see me in the park with Mr. Heron; it is quite true. You have said nothing untrue of me; what right have I to complain?"

Then she made a slight, hardly perceptible movement—one of those movements which it comes by

nature to even the least affected women to make, and which convey so much with such little effort. It indicated to Blanchet, beyond the possibility of mistake, that the interview was at an end.

"At least try to forgive me," he said despairingly. "I thought all you Christians were bound to do that."

"It is not a question of forgiving," she said with the same composed air; "I have no power to punish, Mr. Blanchet, and I don't see why we should speak of forgiving. You don't ask me, I suppose, to think just the same of you to-day as I thought yesterday? I could hardly do that, even as a Christian duty."

As Blanchet was hurrying out of the house he met his sister in the hall. She ran to him with inquiring eyes, seeking in his face for some sign of coming happiness to all of them. He stopped and looked at her, and then a sudden thought seemed to take possession of him, and he caught her arm.

"Come away with me," he said; "get your things and come away this moment. This is no place for you."

She has refused him again, poor Mary thought. Oh, why then did she send for him at all?

"But, Herbert, my dear, how can I leave her? Do you want me to go away from Minola for ever?"

"Yes, yes, for ever. Come away this moment, I tell you. I'll take care of you; I'll provide for you, if that is it. But come away from this place. We have no right to be here, either of us."

"What has she said to you, Herbert—what have you done?"

"She has said nothing to me; I wish she had said

something to me. What have I done? I have acted like a treacherous cad——”

“Oh, Herbert, it can't be!”

“It is, I tell you. Come away from this, Mary; you have no right to be here; come away this moment, I tell you.”

His energy quite overbore poor Mary. She had never seen him in such a mood before; indeed she had never seen anyone else in such a mood. She could no more have stood out against him than against a storm. But the idea of her going away from Minola seemed like an overturning of the world.

“But won't you tell me what this is all about? What have you done, Herbert? Why must I leave her? How could I live without her? What would she say?”

“I'll tell you all when you come with me; I'll tell you nothing now. Get your things; I will give you five minutes—go along, Mary, and be quick.”

Mary looked wildly up and down as one who hopes, perhaps, that some supernatural intervention may come at the last moment to rescue her from a doom which she has no strength to fight against herself. She looked up the stairs and along the hall, and even to the ceiling. Nothing came to save her. She burst into tears.

“Come,” said Herbert, turning his dark eyes on her with a wildness in them which she could not trifle with any longer.

“I'll come, Herbert; I'll come.”

She ran upstairs; she rushed into the room where Minola was, and clasped Minola in her arms, and clung about her and kissed her, and stammered some incoherent words of fondness and good-bye, and ran out

again before Minola could understand what she meant or what she was about to do. In another moment Minola heard the street door shut, and going to the window saw Mary hurrying off with her brother.

Minola felt dazed by the sudden occurrences of the day. She looked after the departing figures of Mary Blanchet and her brother, and at first could hardly understand the situation. Then she turned and looked into the darkening lonely room, and she felt very much alone indeed.

CHAPTER XV.

The Man without a Grievance.

THE man with the grievance had got his chance at last. His time had come. The hopes with which he came over to England, and which had so often seemed to fail and fade from him, were likely to be realised now. He was about to have a hearing for his cause. He was to make his statement in the presence of all England—that is to say, from the floor of the House of Commons. The night fixed for the hearing of Victor Heron's motion in the House had come, and it had excited a great deal of public interest, and was certain of a patient consideration.

The destinies had surely been very kind to Heron since his coming to England. He thought of this as he was crossing the park from his lodgings to get to the House of Commons this particular evening, and found his nerves becoming tremulous with the anticipation of the coming fight, of the speech he had to make, and of the success which he felt confident the justice of his case must win for it. When he landed in England, under a sort of cloud and otherwise obscure, he found at first that it was hardly possible to get anyone of influence even to listen to what he had to say. He could not now but admire, to use the old phrase, the change which had been wrought for him in the condition of things. There was a time when he

would readily have given ten or twenty years of his life for the chance that now was coming so easily to him. He ought to be a proud and happy man. Proud he might perhaps have been, were it not that he felt terribly nervous now that the time was so near; but happy he certainly did not feel. To be happy in any manner of political success, or at least to enjoy it thoroughly, one ought to have no heart, he began to think. He was very unhappy; his unhappiness rose up between him and his grievance—between him and his speech. He was glad to take refuge in the thought of the inevitable speech, and in the nervous trepidation that it called up; even that was better than thinking of other things. He endeavoured to fix his attention exclusively on the approaching debate, and to make himself believe that the end of all things would come the moment it was over. He had gained the great object of his life—at least, he stood on the direct way to gain it—and this was the spirit in which he received the crowning of his hopes.

Mr. Augustus Sheppard went down to the House that night to hear the debate. It was not a party question, everyone said, and he was free to wish that Victor might gain his cause. Indeed, it was Victor himself who was obtaining a seat for his former rival to hear the debate. Mr. Sheppard quite understood now that it was good form to be on friendly terms with a man whom you had opposed unsuccessfully at an election. He had some interest, too, of his own in the present debate and in Heron's success. There was a general impression that if Heron made out a real case the Government would certainly give him the very next good appointment in the colonial administra-

tions that came to their hand; and Sheppard assumed that that and not a parliamentary life would be the object of Heron's ambition. Heron then would resign the seat for Keeton which he had only obtained by a fluke; and Mr. Sheppard would have a capital opportunity next time, when it was not likely that the odd chances that had defeated him could occur again. He felt still a sort of superstitious longing for success at Keeton, because it had so long been in his hopes; and he had a faith that if he carried Keeton he would also carry Minola Grey. He was, then, in a peculiarly hopeful mood as he walked towards the House of Commons the evening of Heron's motion.

Mr. Sheppard was a little too early; he generally took care to be a little early for everything. He was never known to be late for an appointment. He began to walk more slowly when he came near Westminster Palace, for he saw by the clock on the tower that he had plenty of time to spare. He slowly entered Westminster Hall, and found himself entangled in a crowd there. A case of some public interest was going on in one of the law courts on the right of the hall, and people were waiting to see some of the witnesses pass out; while on the left of the hall others were watching to see members of Parliament pass in. Sheppard remembered that the case was one in which a good many noblemen were more or less interested, and that among others the duke, who was his feudatory chief, had expressed some opinion about it, and had even been present at some of the sittings of the court. He stood a moment, therefore, with a sort of respectful and well-regulated curiosity, and he asked a question of one or two persons around him; and it happened

that he saw a friend or two passing through the crowd, and he interchanged a few words. He pleased himself with thinking of the time, now perhaps very near, when people would see him passing into the House of Commons with other members, and then he began to make his way forward, believing it not becoming that a person of such expectations should be seen standing in a curious crowd. He was making his way clear of the throng when a tall man passed him, whose appearance seemed familiar to Mr. Sheppard. Mr. Sheppard, however, went on his way; but the other stopped and looked after him, and then strode in pursuit and speedily overtook him. A hand was laid on Mr. Sheppard's shoulder, and a friendly voice was heard in his ear.

"Hullo, Sheppard—how are you? Don't bear malice, I hope—especially as I lost as well as you."

Mr. Sheppard turned round and saw a figure which he could not mistake. He forgot, however, for the moment some of the conditions under which the figure chose to present itself to society; and he began in a doubtful and embarrassed tone:

"Oh, yes; I beg your pardon, Lord Hugh——"

"I say, Sheppard, cut that! I have dropped all that sort of thing; I'm the opposite to the dog, don't you know, in the fable: he dropped the substance to get at the shadow; I drop the shadow seeing that I can't have the substance; and I think you'll own, Sheppard, that I am the more sensible animal of the two."

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. St. Paul."

"Thank you, Sheppard, it's very kind of you. You don't look particularly pleased, and that makes it all

the more good of you to say it." And Mr. St. Paul laughed his familiar laugh.

"Well, we met last time under circumstances that don't of themselves tend to make men pleased to see each other, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said; for he was not to be long kept in awe of a person of noble family when that person was not respectable in his conduct, and was not on good terms with the head of the house.

"I don't know; it was a fair fight, Sheppard; I lost as well as you. I dare say if I had got in you would have had a petition?"

"I think it highly probable we should have taken some such course, Mr. St. Paul. There would certainly have seemed to be some justification for such a course."

"I wonder who would have paid the expenses if there had been a petition against me."

"I should have found the means to pay them, Mr. St. Paul."

"Found the means, I dare say; but would not the means have been found in my brother's purse, Sheppard?"

"I am not dependent on your noble brother, Mr. St. Paul, greatly as I respect him, and as everyone must respect him."

"Quite right, Sheppard; quite right. But we will not fight about that now. I am going off again, and I had rather part company on good terms with as many old friends as will do me the favour to be civil to me."

"I thought you had left England, Mr. St. Paul."

"No; I am getting off to-morrow or next day; one has such a lot of things to do, don't you know. But,

I say, have you heard the news about our old friend Money?"

"No, I have heard nothing about Mr. Money or his family," Sheppard said with some appearance of interest. "Nothing bad, I hope. I should be sorry if——"

"Well, that is pretty much as you choose to take it. I should not call it bad to leave this confounded country; but I don't know how you may look at the matter."

"Is Mr. Money going to leave the country?"

"Right away. He has sent in his retiring address to his constituents. A chance for you there, Sheppard, perhaps. Money helped to put a Liberal in for Keeton—you might retaliate by getting yourself in for his borough."

"But why does he take so strange and sudden a step? Not any business calamity, surely?"

"No, no; a business affair, but not a business calamity—unless your patriotic soul, Sheppard, sees a calamity in anything done by a Briton in the service of a foreign country. Our friend Money is going to let the Emperor of Russia have all the benefit of his services as an inventor and constructor of engines chiefly used in the unchristian work of destruction."

"Indeed? You astonish me."

"Do I? I am glad of it; it is something to have anyone to astonish with a piece of news. *I* knew it must come to this long ago. It was all very well while everything looked peaceful, and the lion lying down with the lamb, and all that sort of thing, *you* know. But, by Jove! we may have a big fight now any day, and our friend would soon find he couldn't serve the two masters. He's a sensible fellow—Money; and he

makes his choice while he can do so decently, without actually seeming to go over to the enemy, don't you know. Of course, he is quite right; we wouldn't pay him, and t'other party will; and why should he not get the best pay he can in times like these, Sheppard, my boy? That's business, isn't it? We all live by business, you know."

"Still, I should have thought that there was more of patriotic feeling in Mr. Money—and he having sat so long in Parliament too——"

"Ah, that's it, you know!" St. Paul said carelessly. "He has been behind the scenes and sees how things are done; you have not as yet. He knows what it all comes to; he is a sensible fellow—Money; you may be sure he knows uncommonly well what he is about, Sheppard. I knew this long time it must come to this."

"And this is beyond doubt?" Sheppard asked, still dubitating, and at the same time trying to follow out a train of ideas applying to himself more exclusively.

"True as Gospel. I have just read his retiring address—in which, however, he takes good care, of course, not to be very explicit about the cause of his going off; and I have been talking to the man who is going to marry his daughter in a few days."

"Oh, Mr. Heron?"

"No, not Heron; the other man—I forget his name, who was at the bar, you know—I remember him at Oxford; the fellow who marries the elder sister——"

Mr. Sheppard signified that he understood the meaning of Mr. St. Paul's reference.

"Well, of course, he did not say exactly what I knew to be the fact; but he did not contradict it. I

fancy he is not very sorry that Money is going out of the country. He wants to be in society, you know; and, of course, Money is not just the sort of father-in-law for a man in society."

"You don't know, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said, becoming almost friendly in his anxiety to learn all about this affair; "you don't know, I suppose, whom Mr. Money takes with him to Russia?"

"No, I don't know; only his wife, I suppose. If the other girl marries our young friend Heron, it isn't likely she would be going off to Russia, I suppose. They say Heron will get a colony somewhere. Well, glad to see you, Sheppard; good-bye."

"You are very kind, I'm sure, Mr. St. Paul," Sheppard said with a certain fervour, for he really thought it was friendly of St. Paul to speak to him so good-humouredly after all that had passed between them on the memorable night of the riot at Keeton.

St. Paul laughed.

"I am going to be a great deal more kind to you now, Sheppard; for I'm going to leave you just in time to save your credit. I see my brother coming; and if you were caught in conference with me you would never set foot inside any house of his again. Good-bye, Sheppard."

St. Paul nodded, smiled, and turned away. Sheppard stood for a moment and looked after his great stooping form, as it made its way out through the crowd, and then he prepared to pay his respects to the chief of the ducal house. He felt a little humiliated by the parting words of St. Paul, but it must be confessed that it was a source of some gladness to him not to be found in parley with the disreputable younger

brother when the duke came up. The duke was hurrying by, and only gave Mr. Sheppard a hand to shake, and a "How-d'ye-do, Sheppard?" But this was something to have got unalloyed by any qualification or suspicion which the presence of St. Paul might have infused into it.

But even while the dry cool fingers of the duke were still in his momentary possession, Mr. Sheppard was thinking of how the disappearance of the Money family from Minola's horizon would affect his chances with her. He thought of this as he sat and listened to Victor Heron's speech. It may be said, in passing, that Sheppard did not greatly admire the speech. It seemed to him to want order and finish. He was surprised that Heron should have plunged into the subject so directly. Mr. Sheppard had been studying rhetoric of late, and he had formed for himself a very clear idea of how Victor's subject ought to be treated. He thought the speaker should have begun with a sketch of the growth and greatness of England's colonial system; should have shown how the glory of England depends in great measure on the way in which she governs her colonies; should have had a good deal to say about the manner in which the great Mr. Pitt had condemned slavery; might even, perhaps, have quoted a passage from Mr. Pitt's famous peroration about the sunlight streaming in upon the mind of Africa as it did, while he spoke, through the windows of the House of Commons; and thus brought the House, as it were, into tune with the particular question to be debated that day. Victor did nothing of all this, but began in an easy conversational tone, and in three sentences was right into the heart of his subject, only warming into

anything like eloquence as he came to deal with occasional passages on which he felt deeply, and then as soon as possible resuming the quietly argumentative tone again. The House seemed to like it evidently, and Sheppard heard people near him saying it was going to be a great success. Mr. Sheppard was a little astonished, but felt that he ought to be pleased for more reasons than one. He was satisfied he could make a far more eloquent speech than that; and if that sort of thing was successful, he might fairly expect to take rank among the great orators of the House when he got his chance.

But he was only thinking of all this at passing moments. For the most part his mind was occupied with thoughts of Minola, and of the manner in which the departure of the Moneys would affect her and by consequence him. If Mr. and Mrs. Money went to Russia, and Heron and his wife went to some colony, then Minola would be left almost absolutely alone in London. He knew the girl too well to think that she would look for new friends. Surely, then, she would come to value his steady, faithful love? He would have become a success by that time, and no woman is indifferent to success. She would see that in his love there was nothing interested or selfish. Indeed, his love for her was not selfish in the ordinary sense. It would have surprised both him and her to know it, but it was true all the same that in one respect at least he did strongly resemble her beloved Alceste. His extreme love went so far as to form wishes against her who was its object: he could have wished that she were reduced to miserable condition—that Heaven, in giving her birth, had given her nothing—that she had

neither money nor friends—in order that he might have the happiness of seeing her depend for everything upon the helping hand of his love. Mr. Sheppard was less acquainted even with Tibullus than with Molière, but the Latin poet had expressed many hundreds of years before Alceste the wish that often filled Sheppard, as it had filled Minola's hero, the "*Utinam possis uni mihi bella videri, displiceas aliis; sic ego tutus ero.*" This wish was strong in Sheppard's mind while Victor Heron was addressing the House. Indeed, no love from the most romantic and passionate lover could have been a better tribute to a woman's worth than that of Sheppard for Minola Grey. All her other lovers were taking her on mere trust. All the others were caught by some charm in her which they could perhaps not define. She might for aught they could tell be in reality something quite different from what she seemed to be. Sheppard had known her almost from her cradle-time; he saw her faults as the others probably did not; he had often winced under her occasional touches of sarcasm; he knew very well that she had always done injustice to him, but he knew how sterling, how sweet, how true was the woman's heart that was within her breast; he had seen her tried in all manner of ways, and he had seen that trial always only brought out the simple nobility of her nature; he was as certain as he was of life that if once he could induce her to marry him she would never have any other thought than how to make him happy. In his love there was undoubtedly that calculating spirit which belonged to all his nature. He sometimes admitted this to himself in a manner; for he occasionally said to himself, "No one else would

lose so much in losing her as I should, for no one else knows so well what she is worth."

The debate did not last a very long time. It was over in rather a sudden way, Mr. Sheppard thought. As far as he could understand, some one on behalf of the Government was put up to say that Mr. Heron had done quite the right thing in all he did, and that his only mistake was in supposing that there was the faintest idea of disapproving of any part of his administration. Then Mr. Money got up, and in a few short and very telling sentences seemed to say that if the Government had felt approval they had a very odd way of showing it, and that he thought the honourable member for Keeton had much better press his motion for inquiry. Then other Opposition members said something to the same effect; and one or two grave and independent members on the Ministerial side said something of the same kind; and then at last a very leading member of the Government got up, and made the most emphatic assurances of respect and regard for all Mr. Heron had done, and declared that the Government were quite prepared to accept a simple resolution expressing the approval of the House of the manner in which the St. Xavier's Settlements had been administered. There was no possibility of fighting any further. Heron had won a complete victory, and the whole affair was over. Before Mr. Sheppard had time to rise from his seat the House of Commons was occupied with something else, and its benches were nearly empty.

He hurried into the lobby and had a chance of saying a word or two of congratulation to Mr. Heron.

Then he saw Mr. Money come out, and he pushed his way up to him and held him fast.

"Is this true, Mr. Money, this strange news that I hear? Is it true that you are going to leave old England?"

"Quite true, Mr. Sheppard; at least, that I am going to leave old England for a time. I dare say she can muddle on somehow without me."

"And you are going soon?"

"As soon as I can get away. I came down here to-night for the last time to give a vote for Heron's motion, if a vote were needed, which you see it was not. You heard the debate? Didn't they get shabbily out of it?"

Mr. Sheppard was not thinking much of the debate.

"I suppose you take some of your family with you to Russia, Mr. Money?"

"Some, yes; but not all."

"Oh, no! I know," Mr. Sheppard said, with the air of one who understands everything. "I was going to ask whether Miss Grey is going with you?"

"Miss Grey? No; why should she go?"

"Well, I didn't know; she and your ladies appear to be such friends, and she is so much alone that I thought perhaps——"

"Miss Grey would be only too welcome," Money said gravely, "if she cared to exile herself, Mr. Sheppard; but I don't think it at all likely that she will leave London."

"Then she will be quite alone?"

Mr. Money looked Sheppard fixedly in the face

with a curious expression, in which there was a dash of pity.

"Well, I don't know, Sheppard, I'm sure. Perhaps she will not be so much alone after all. Good-night; if we should not see you again, why then good-bye and good luck."

He wrung Sheppard's hand with a grasp of unusual warmth and friendship. There was something in the pressure as of one who sympathises or commiserates. It was perhaps because he was going away, Mr. Sheppard thought; and he felt touched by the kindness even while he was glad that the Moneys were going away, and that Victor Heron was to be married, and doubtless to go away too; for then Minola would be left to him without a friend to come between the two; and in the end she must marry him.

Mr. Sheppard left the House of Commons and walked to the West Centre, and took up his stand for a while under Minola's windows, thinking of how much alone she soon must be, and having very little idea of how utterly alone she actually was then. If Minola could have looked out of her window and seen him; if she could have known of all his faithful watching; if she could have realised the fact that now in her utter loneliness, when all others seemed to have gone from her, he still remained and was only longing to make himself endurable to her, would she have thought of making to him the offer she had so nearly made to Blanchet? It would be rash to conjecture. She was very wretched, and life seemed to have no hope any more. The desertion of Mary Blanchet had touched her to the very core. It is hard to say what the presence of any love and devotion, however formal and

inartistic, might not have done at such a time. Perhaps had she seen Sheppard in that moment, and had he spoken out, the cross-purposes of the story of all their lives might have been made complete and inextricable.

Meanwhile Victor Heron had got rid of most of his congratulating friends, and stood alone for a moment in a corner of the thinning lobby. He had won a success, complete and beyond his hopes; it had been a success for his cause, and with that, too, a success for himself. Although Mr. Sheppard had not thought very highly of his style of eloquence, it had taken the House of Commons completely. He could not possibly doubt the reality of the success he had made. Member after member came up to grasp his hand and congratulate him, in that spirit of fellowship which is so remarkable in the House of Commons. Men who were entirely opposed to him in political views—men who had never spoken to him before—men who would have voted against him if the Government had opposed his motion and it had gone to a division, now rushed up to offer him the most sincere congratulations on the success of the speech he had made. Victor was very emotional as we know, and there were moments when he could not reply to these kindly words, and when strange lights seemed to twinkle before his eyes, and he only saw as through a mist. He was proud; he was humbled. In the pride and in the humility, however, there was a dull pain always at his heart. He kept thinking of her who had urged him on again and again to perseverance in his course; who had faith in him when no one else had; who stimulated him to new exertion when no one else saw into his heart and

his purpose, and believed in his success. He might have had her to share in the success; her bright eyes might even now be moistening near his own in the joy of this great triumph. In whatever career this might open up to him, he might have had her companionship. She would have helped him to serve his country, and to leave a name which perhaps might be written down with honour in the list of England's servants who had done faithful work. He stood there pulling his moustache and thinking; quite depressed amid all his success, and feeling that, if his cause had had a victory, his life was only a failure.

While he thus stood, some one who had passed into the House of Commons came out into the lobby again; and an arm was put through Heron's, and he heard Mr. Money's voice, and he awoke from his melancholy brooding.

"Will you walk out with me, Heron? There's nothing going on here that you and I are likely to care about. I am going up to Pall Mall; will you walk with me across the Park? I want to speak to you as soon as possible on a matter of some interest to both of us."

Mr. Money's manner was unusually grave. There was no need for him to tell Victor that he had something serious to say. Victor saw that well enough as he looked in Money's face. Heron felt the blood rush into his own face. He seemed to himself somehow as one to whom an accusation of guilt is suddenly brought home. He did not say a word just then, but allowed Money to lead him away; and they left the lobby together.

As they were passing down Westminster Hall, Money stopped suddenly and turned round:

"I was fond of this old place," he said; "I am sorry to leave it. I had a sort of ambition to get on here once. Odd, is it not, Heron you are just beginning here as I am giving up? I suppose I shall never cross the floor of the House of Commons again. Well, I am sorry; but then there are so many things to be sorry for!"

He said no more, and they walked in silence out of the great hall and into the streets.

CHAPTER XVI.

"He wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted."

MR. MONEY and Heron crossed the lighted and noisy enclosure in front of Westminster Hall, amid the rattling hansoms, the flashing lamps of carriages, the rushing and shouting of policemen, the cantering-up of grooms with horses for the senators who were to ride home, the eager crowd going in, coming out, and hanging round generally, in the hope of seeing anything. They passed out of the enclosure, and across Parliament Square, and so into the road through the Park. A contrast was ready for them there. The place was all silent, dark, and lonely. Over the broad arid spaces that opened out before them, along by the Horse Guards and up to where the column on Waterloo Place could be seen faintly marking the dark grey sky with its darker grey, there were hardly any living figures but their own. Up to this time they had not spoken a word. Then Money began:

"That's turned out all right, Heron? You are satisfied, of course, with the way things went?"

"Oh, yes; everything turned out better even than I expected. I owe you a great deal for your part in it."

"That's nothing. They acted shabbily at first—the Government, I mean; but they always do; and it's all the better for you that they had to give in so completely. Your speech was capital; a complete success;

everybody says so. You are all right, whether you choose to stay in Parliament or whether you don't."

"I don't know what I shall do," Victor said despondingly. He was not thinking much now of his parliamentary success, or of his righted grievance. He knew that it was not to talk to him about this that Money had brought him this way, and he waited for what he knew must be coming; reluctant to hear it, longing to have it out and done with. There was a moment's silence; then Money said, "Oh, you have time enough to think about all that!"

This had reference to Victor's last answer. Victor had once more the pain of expecting that the real business was coming and of being deceived. Nothing more was said on that subject; they walked on silent again. Victor was making up his mind to abridge his agony by telling Money that he knew what he had come to speak about, and begging that they might get to it at once; when at last Mr. Money, after a cough or two, and one or two hasty hard puffs at his cigar, began to speak in a voice which made Heron quite certain that the real moment had arrived.

"About this little girl of mine—I am afraid, Heron, we have been getting into rather a false position, and I think we had better get out of it as soon as we can."

"Lucy has been speaking to you?" Heron said, in the tone of one who has no defence to make.

"She has. She spoke out very sensibly, I think; I am glad my little maid has so much sense. She has made up her mind."

"Made up her mind to what?"

"She thinks that you and she would make a great

mistake if you were to get married. You have both made a mistake already, and she thinks—and I think, Heron—it would be only making things infinitely worse, and incurable in fact, if you were to carry on the thing any longer.”

“Why does Lucy think of this?”

“She says she is convinced that between you and her there is not—well, that there is not that sort of love which would make it safe and happy for you to marry. She thinks that there is some one you would care for more if you had the chance, and who would care more for you—and, in short, she is resolved that you and she are both to be set free.”

“Lucy never said a word of this to me—she never complained to me of anything—she never spoke of such a thing. Some one must have been telling her something——”

“I don’t know anything about that—she has not told me, and I have asked her no questions. I believe the truth is, Heron, that she fancies Miss Grey and you would be much better suited to each other, and that you made a sort of mistake when you thought of her, and that she is now in the way between you and her friend; and she is resolved not to be so any longer.”

“If this is my fault——” Heron began.

“If it is your fault, Heron, it is partly my fault as well, and more mine than yours or hers——”

“Oh! as to her,” Heron broke in, “what fault is there in her?—except that she fancied for a moment she could care about such a fellow as I am, wrapped up in my own trumpery affairs and my twopenny grievances. What other fault could there be in her?”

"Well, I know there is some fault in me—and I am the cause of all this, in a manner, at least. I made a dead set at you, Heron; I confess it. I thought you would make a capital husband for my girl; I own that I did my very best to throw you two together. Odd, isn't it, that a man should do such a thing? Her mother was as innocent of the whole affair as the child unborn. I was the match-maker. The plot was innocent enough, Heron; for I should have done all the same if you had not sixpence in the world, or the chance of getting it; I should have found the sixpences, if Lucy liked you and you her. I liked you, Heron, and that's a fact, and I do still; and I thought you were the sort of man to whom I could trust my daughter's happiness when I left England, as I always knew I must do sooner or later, and went to live in a country which may be at war with this any day, Heaven knows when or wherefore. I have grievances enough against the governments and the systems of this country, but I am Englishman enough to wish that my girls should both be married to genuine, loyal lovers of the old country. Well, I am disappointed; but I see that I have myself to blame. I'll take Lucy to Russia with me; she will not stay here, she says, although she might stay with her sister if she would."

Victor Heron groaned.

"I wish Lucy and you had never seen me," he said. "You have been the kindest friends to me that man could have—and this is how I make you amends!"

"Well," said Money, "in helping you on, of course I was playing a game of my own part of the time, for I thought I was pushing along a husband for my

daughter. I don't blame you, Heron, one bit; it would be out of the nature of things that a boy and girl should not fancy they were in love with one another who were thrown together, as I took care that Lucy and you should be. But, mind, I meant you to love each other really; it was no part of my plan to marry my Lucelet to any man who was not deep and downright in love with her, and she with him. I never calculated on the possibility of both of you making a mistake."

"Then Lucy finds that *she* has made a mistake?" Heron asked, a strange light of hope burning up within him. If he could but think that Lucy wished of her own accord to be free of him, he felt that he could be happy once more.

"Yes," said Money gravely, "my daughter now thinks, Heron, that she has made a mistake. She does not think she is as much in love with you as she ought to be if you were to be married and to be happy; and I fancy she is a good deal relieved to know or to think that you are not in love with her. It will be a case of quits and good friends, I hope, Heron."

Victor was silent and thoughtful for a moment. He was stricken with amazement. It was, indeed, the profoundest relief to find that he was positively thrown over by Lucy. But who could have believed in such a sudden change? All that the worst cynics had ever said of woman could not equal this. There was something shocking in the thought that he might have been married to a girl so light of purpose. He could hardly believe it. Certainly, if anyone but Lucy's father had said it, he would have denied it angrily. Is it possible, he thought, that women generally can be like this?

"She has changed her mind very soon," Victor said; and there was a bitterness in his tone which he could not repress.

"Why she?" Money asked coldly. "Is she the only one? *You* made a mistake, Heron; so did she, it seems."

"Well, I am glad to know that Lucy will not suffer much by this; I am glad there is to be no breaking of hearts."

"On either side; yes, so am I. In truth, Heron, I don't mind admitting to you that I fear my little girl is not a very constant little person, and that she does not always know her own mind. Odd, too; for her mother was and is the most steadfast and devoted of women. But there's a great deal of stuff talked about the influence and example of parents and so forth. No, I don't think Lucelet is a girl who always knows her own mind."

"I should not have thought she was like that," Victor said.

"No; you would rather, I suppose, that she cried her eyes out when she found that you were not exactly as fond of her as she thought you ought to be? That's the way of us men, Heron, I suppose. But I don't mind saying that I am a little surprised, too; and I don't know that I am quite pleased. I am not sure that I wouldn't rather see my girl suffer a little of the heart-ache than have so little heart to suffer in. I shouldn't have thought it of her. But I remember now that she used to be half in love with that Blanchet creature at one time. Well, she isn't like her mother in that way; all the happier, perhaps, for her in the end."

They walked on for a while in silence. Each had enough of his own thoughts to occupy him.

"Oh! one thing I ought to tell you," Money suddenly said, and he touched Victor lightly on the arm. "It may interest you by and by. When I first laid my plans for you, Heron—these plans that have turned out so successful—I had certain ideas of my own. I thought, perhaps, there was some one else who had a better claim on you than Lucelet, and I took some trouble to find out. I had it on the best authority, as the phrase goes, that there was no such person; I would not have moved a step otherwise. If I moved at all, it was because I was assured that the coast was clear."

"I don't think I quite understand——"

"No? I don't think you quite understood yourself at that time. Shall I put it plainer?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, as plainly as words can make it! We have been playing at cross-purposes quite long enough."

"Very well," said Money coolly. "I talked to Miss Grey, and I asked her directly if she knew of anyone who was likely to be nearer to you than Lucelet. I tell you plainly I thought you were much more likely to care for her than for Lucelet, and that she was a girl far better suited to you. She knew perfectly well what I meant; and she answered me."

Even in the darkness of the night Victor knew that the blood was crimsoning his face. He groaned again.

"Yes, she answered me; she told me she knew of no such woman. I believed her then, and I believe her now. I am sure that was what she thought then. It must be owned, Heron, my good fellow, that you

don't seem exactly to shine in the art of knowing your own mind. You were very near making a nice muddle of this."

"I have made a nice muddle of everything. I am ashamed to look anyone in the face."

"You will get over that. I dare say. Don't make a muddle again, that's all. You are well out of this, and so are we. I am hardly sorry that Lucelet hasn't her mother's steady true heart when I think what she might have suffered. Well, that is all about it. We have said all we need to say, I think; for the rest, the more silence the better."

"And I am dismissed?" said Heron, with a melancholy smile.

"You are dismissed. It is my daughter's wish that you and she should see no more of each other, and under the circumstances it is mine. The thing is at an end."

"Will Lucy not even see me?"

"No; she is of opinion that it would be much better she and you should not meet again, and I think so too. She will always think of you with a friendly feeling, and so shall I. Nothing that has happened need make you and me anything but friends, I hope."

By this time they had reached the foot of the flight of steps that leads up to the column on Waterloo Place. They had been walking very slowly. Money came to a stand there as if they were to go no farther together.

"I am so confused by all this," said Heron, "I don't know what to say. I should like to ask Lucy to forgive me; I want to ask you to forgive me. I seem to myself like a criminal, and yet I think you ought

to have been all more frank with me; I don't know. I am like one in a dream."

"Better remain in the dream for the present; the rights and wrongs of all this are too puzzling for you or me. All I know is, that the thing is over, and that I am disappointed, and that I feel somehow it serves me right. I bear you no ill-feeling whatever, Heron; I hope you feel the same to me. I liked you; we were good friends. I don't like many men; I am sorry to lose you, and the House of Commons, and my little Lucelet's settlement in life, which I thought was so secure, and I am glad she takes it so easily, and sorry she hasn't feelings a little deeper, perhaps; and altogether I'm somewhat in the condition of the man in the old proverb, who has lost a shilling and found sixpence, and so makes up his mind that things might have been worse."

"I don't see how things could very well have been worse," Heron said despondingly.

"Yes, they would have been a great deal worse if Lucelet and you had found out all this after you were married and not before, and I were away in Russia and couldn't look after my little girl any more. Not that you wouldn't be an excellent husband in any case, Heron, I'm sure, but it would not be the sort of thing we any of us wanted; and it would be too late to set things right then, and it is not now. That's how things might have been worse, Heron."

"There is something in all this I don't understand at all," Heron said vehemently; "I don't mean as regards you, Money, of course; but this sudden change of Lucy's. It isn't like her; I can't make it out——"

"My good fellow, would you have it otherwise? Do

you want to persuade Lucelet to change her mind again and to marry you? I tell you openly, that if there were the least chance of her doing so—which there is not—I would not allow her."

"No, I don't mean that; but I am sure she must have been told something about me—this is so unlike her——"

"What does all that matter? The affair is best left as it is. She says she will not marry you; you don't want to marry her; I don't want now that you should marry each other. In Heaven's name what can we all do better than to say no more about it, and shake hands and part? Do you think it is a state of things that is likely to be any the better for asking the why and the wherefore of this and that? I don't. It's all over, Heron, and that's the long and the short of it. I am going to a new country, and a new country is a new career, they say. I dare say you'll hear some day of Lucelet being married to a Russian prince. Anyhow, think of us kindly as we shall of you always, and if you can do anything here and I over there to keep the two countries on terms of friendship, let us do so, in God's name, my boy. I don't want to finish up my career by firing upon the old flag or failing to stand by the new one; and so good-bye."

He held out his hand. Victor took it in silence. Indeed, he would have found it hard to say anything very coherent just then.

"Oh! by the way," Money said, "I was near forgetting. You have a cigar-case about you?"

Victor produced his cigar-case.

"Give it to me," Money said, "and take mine. It will be a friendly exchange, and will remind us of

each other if we need any reminding. Here—that's the cigar-case I had when we met and talked together that first night in Paris."

Heron took the case and gave his own, saying, as well as he could, "And this is the one that I had then, too."

"Ah, yes, I was in hopes it would be so. Well, that's all right. You told me then I had better have nothing to do with you—don't you remember?—because you were a man with a grievance."

"I wish to Heaven you had followed my advice."

"No, no, Heron; don't say that. You are not to blame for anything, and we were good friends, and we always shall be I hope, and we have had some pleasant times together, and I hope to hear lots of good news of you in every way. Well, good-bye, and whenever either of us pulls out his cigar-case to have a smoke, he can't help thinking of the night we first talked together in Paris."

"Yes," Heron said, "and of the last night we talked together in London."

Not another word was said. They shook hands again, and went their different ways. Money went up the steps to Waterloo Place, and Heron walked slowly along the dark road by the railings of the Park, hardly knowing indeed whither he was going. If, out of all the sudden confusion, some brighter way was likely to open upon him than that which he had of late been so darkly treading, it is only justice to him to say that he did not then think of that or of anything that directly concerned himself. For the moment he only thought of the voice which had always sounded so friendly in his ears since first he heard it on the bal-

cony of the Paris hotel, which had never told him of anything but friendliness, and encouragement, and kindness, and which in all probability he was never to hear again. Had any other thoughts tried to force themselves into his mind, he would have resolutely put them away for that hour. The woman whom he loved would surely have been the last on earth to blame him, could she have known of it, because in that moment he gave up his thoughts to the friend he had lost.

CHAPTER XVII.

A General Breaking-up.

WAS Lucy, then, really that fickle light-o'-love that her father had regretfully reported her to be? The answer is a little complex, as most answers are which seek to explain human character. She certainly was no light-o'-love in the sense of having actually changed in any of her personal devotion to Heron. She loved him very deeply, for the present; and her love was as likely to prove an abiding emotion if it had the chances in its favour as any sentiment entertained by a girl whose whole nature was affectionate and tender rather than strong. But she had for some time begun to doubt whether Heron was really devoted to her, and whether, if he were not so, they could be very happy together. She had begun to see that her presence was not necessary to his happiness. Many a time she had noticed that he always put aside his favourite topics when he came to talk to her. She had tried to get up such political subjects as she knew to be interesting to him, but she could not throw her soul into them; and, in spite of all that she could do, she saw that he began to think he was boring her when he talked of such things, and he persisted in turning to something else. There were times, indeed, as we have already said, when Victor, stricken with a kind of remorse because he did not love her more, became sud-

denly so attentive and so tender that Lucy was very happy. But even then she came by degrees to see that this, too, was only a coming down to her level, not a lover's rapturous delight in the society of her he loved. In truth, she had had the greatest desire of her young life gratified so far, and she found that she was not more happy but less happy than before. She began to look forward to the future with a deepening dread.

All this, however, was only a dim apprehension, such as might well trouble the soul of any girl about to enter into an entirely new way of life, and to give up her happiness into the keeping of one who was, after all, comparatively a stranger. Lucy had been so happy at home, so closely cared for, so tenderly loved by father and mother, that she might well feel a little doubt and sinking of the heart at the prospect of leaving for ever the nest in which she had been so sweetly sheltered. Her home life had almost no duties. She was only asked to be happy, and to love her father, mother, and sister; and she could not help doing all this in any case. It would not, therefore, be possible that she could look out with mere delight to the leaving of such a home. But if things had gone on in the ordinary course, she would, perhaps, have begun to think less and less of the danger of not being loved enough by her future husband; and once they were married, she would probably, after a few months, have ceased to think about the matter at all. For up to this time she had only feared that Victor Heron was not as much in love with her as she knew she was with him. The idea had not arisen in her mind that he might all the time be in love with some one else.

These fears and doubts came by fits and starts.

There were bright days when she seemed to wake up in the morning with no fears and doubts at all. Such a day was that on which she expected and received the visit from Minola. The very evening before she had been tormented by serious alarms, and begun to think that she must lay open her doubts to some stronger intelligence than her own, and once for all take counsel. There was only one friend to whom she could trust such a confidence, and on whose heart and judgment she thought she could rely, and that was Minola Grey. She wrote to Minola therefore, begging her to come to Victoria Street and see her. This was the letter of which we have already heard, in which she insisted on seeing "dear darling Nola at once, at once," because of something "most particular" on which she wanted her advice "so much, oh, so much!" Strangely enough, when she had written the letter, and thus as she thought made up her mind to seek a confidante and counsel, her doubts and dreads seemed to disappear at once. On the morning when she expected Minola she rose as happy as a bird. She was entirely her old self; she had no doubts or alarms about anything. She felt as she used to do in the childish days when she thought her papa was the richest, greatest, and most powerful man in all the world, who could give his daughter anything she liked to have if it would be good for her. She was satisfied about Victor, about herself, about everything. She determined that when Nola came she would say nothing about the absurd notions that had been in her head and now were completely out of it, and that she would devise some excuse for having sent for Nola, and they would have a delightful day as of old, and she would talk a great

deal to Nola about her coming happiness, and the gifts and graces of Victor; and perhaps she would ask Nola whether it would be well for her, Lucy, to keep trying to get herself up in politics, or whether Victor would not rather be free of her embarrassing attempts to follow him up such steep and toilsome, not to say misty, heights? She was so happy and so full of good-nature that she could not refuse her sister Theresa when the latter asked Lucy to go out with her for a short time.

Perhaps the least important person in this story came to be the one whose chance movement most deeply affected all the other persons in it. If Theresa Money had not asked her sister to go out with her that day, the lives of most of the persons we know in these pages would probably have turned out something quite different. Lucy could not refuse darling Theresa just when they were so soon to separate, in a manner at least, and she went out; and when she came back Minola and Victor Heron were together.

She was so happy and in such high spirits. She loved them both so much. She wondered to see them, as she thought, not friendly enough to each other. She brought them together and made their hands clasp. Then she saw how the colour ran to Minola's face, and how her eyes fell, and how Victor Heron's lips quivered and his hand trembled. She looked from one to the other in surprise, and felt for the moment as if some strong electric influence had flung her forcibly out of a circle in which they two remained. Yet nothing came of it. They parted and went their way, as any mere friends might do. Lucy had not the faintest suspicion of any treachery. She was sure that she

knew all that was to be known. She felt sure that if she was right in the terrible conjecture that came into her mind, it was a discovery for them as well as for her. But she could not persuade herself that she had not made a discovery. She was pierced through and through by the conviction that that one moment had made a change in their lives which nothing on earth could repair. She was *distracted*, wild, almost hysterical, during the remainder of Minola's short visit; and Minola had not left her very long when Blanchet came and told the story he had to tell.

She did not doubt the literal truth of the story, but she did not interpret it in Blanchet's way. She was sure it was a chance meeting; but she was sure also that some words must then have passed between Minola and Victor which came of the unhappy contact she had forced upon them. Her truthful, genial soul got at the reality of things at once, and she saw Victor and Minola in the Park forming noble, disinterested plans of self-sacrifice and of utter silence for her sake. Then her mind was made up. She resolved to see her father at once and tell him that she would not marry Victor Heron; but she resolved, too, to take the burden of the change of mind wholly on herself. She would not make her father and mother unhappy by telling of her own unhappiness. If Minola and Victor were fond of each other, as now seemed but too sure, she would not offer to give Heron up in any way which might allow of a futile and barren rivalry in self-sacrifice. She would make it impossible for anyone to interfere with the course she had determined to follow. It was only wonderful to her now how she could have avoided seeing something of this before—

how it never occurred to her that Minola would be a so much more suitable wife for Victor than she could ever be. Now it all seemed so obvious and clear. Now she understood the strange habitual chilliness which seemed to envelope, like an atmosphere, herself and Victor. Now she understood why their engagement, which she had so longed for, brought her so little happiness. Now her mind went back to that night when she first took Minola into her confidence, and told her of her love for Heron. She remembered how cold, and strange, and unlike herself Minola seemed then; and how from that very hour Minola had always seemed to avoid the company of Heron, with whom she had always before been so friendly; and how sometimes, as Lucy had seen with wonder, Minola had almost appeared to dislike him. "When I told her about myself," Lucy now felt certain, "she was already in love with him, and from that time out she only tried to hide it and to keep away from him."

Therefore Lucy made her sacrifice, such as it was. Let us not undervalue it, even though there had been growing up in her mind for some time a conviction that when she and Heron became engaged to each other it was the result of a sudden impulse—of an impulse rather from her than from him, and that it was a mistake. She still loved him, not indeed with the depth and strength of a more vigorous nature, but very much. She would probably have been very happy if married to him. Her resolve was not the freak of fickleness, even if her love had not the depth of passion. For the hour, at least, she did not believe it possible she could ever love another man as she had loved Heron, and she never was more deeply impressed

with this belief than in the moment when she made up her mind to say that she loved him no more.

Now the thing was done. Some days had passed over, and Lucy's family were all made aware of the change that had taken place, and of the necessity of turning public attention away from it as much as possible. They were making preparations for Theresa's marriage and for the removal to Russia. Lucy kept up her spirits remarkably well, and saw people as if nothing had happened. She even remained in the room with her mother one afternoon, when Lady Limpenny was announced, although a gentle shudder ran through her when she heard the name of the visitor. "She comes to find out all about everything," Lucy said despairingly, as Lady Limpenny rustled, fluttered, and rattled into the room, bringing with her the idea of what Heine called "a tempest in petticoats."

"My dearest Theresa, now do tell me, what is this that all the town is ringing with? I do so want to know, for it is so shocking to hear things said that one does not like to hear, and not to be able to say if they are true or false."

"What are the things, Laura?" Mrs. Money asked, in a voice the soft, deep melancholy of which had received from recent occurrences an additional depth of melancholy.

"Oh, well, everything—all sorts of things—you can't have any idea! Is it true that Mr. Money and you are going away to live in Russia?"

"It is quite true, Laura."

"And to be an enemy of this country, perhaps, when everybody says there is sure to be a war. I

declare to you, darling Theresa, I felt when I heard it as if the end of the world were certainly coming. I do believe it is coming."

"I am sure I wish it would come quickly, Lucy interposed.

"Now, you dear, darling creature, why should you wish that? Of all persons in the world, you to wish that! Do tell me why you wish to have the end of the world come so quickly?"

"Because," Lucy answered coolly, "if the end of the world is to come at all, I should like it to come in my time; I should like to see it, Lady Limpenny."

"Oh, that's it? Oh, yes, yes! But I should be dreadfully afraid; I should not have the courage; you young people have so much courage. I am quite afraid to think of it. But it will come very soon, my dear, very soon; you may depend on that. All the signs are there, I am told. Sir James laughs; he only laughs—think of that! But you are going to live in Russia, all of you, at once?"

"After Theresa is married," Mrs. Money explained. "She, of course, will not go with us."

"Of course not—of course not, dearest Theresa. And this darling girl whom I see before me now—does she go?"

"Yes, Lucy goes with us, of course."

"Indeed!" Lady Limpenny opened her eyes to their uttermost capacity of expansion at this answer, and she prolonged the first syllable of her "indeed" so that it resembled some linked sweetness of music long drawn out. When she had said the word once aloud she appeared to say it over two or three times to herself, for she turned and bowed her head with

exactly the same wondering, enquiring expression which she put on when she indulged in her public demonstration of amazement.

"Oh, yes! Lucy goes with us, of course. She intends to pick up a Russian prince."

This little pleasantry Mrs. Money had borrowed from her husband, believing it to be rather a subtle and clever device for throwing enquiring people off the scent.

"Indeed! A Russian prince. How very nice! And to have a great many serfs, I suppose, like the lady in *Les Danischeffs*—only I know our dear young friend would not be quite so cruel; and, besides, I believe there are no serfs now. But now tell me, you dears, how does our distinguished friend in Parliament—Mr. Heron, I mean—how does he like this? Won't he be apt to quarrel with the Russian prince?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Mrs. Money; "why should he?"

"Why should he?" Oh, indeed! Well, now, really, you do surprise me. Why should he? Well, I should have thought—but of course you know best. And so you are all going to leave us, and to go to Russia! And if there should be a war? I thought Mr. Money was too much of a patriot——"

"Mr. Money is a patriot," his wife solemnly said; "he is too much of a patriot to be able to see his country degraded by an aristocratic system which is inconsistent either with her national progress or with the progress of humanity. England is not the English Government, Laura Limpenny. The English Government have always systematically denied to Mr. Money an opportunity of making his genius serviceable to his

country. His genius has no place in this land under such a system. He leaves England; but he loves the land and the people; it is against the system he protests."

"And you are willing to go, Theresa dearest?" Lady Limpenny asked, feeling herself quite unable to make head against the eloquence and power of this speech.

"I have urged him to go where he will be appreciated, Laura."

"Well, I shall miss you all, I am sure," Lady Limpenny said with a profound sigh; "but these are the ways of life, I suppose. Such changes! Our dear young friend the poet—I never can think of his name—do tell me, Lucy darling, what was the name of that very charming young man that I used to meet here."

"Mr. Blanchet?" Lucy said, not very graciously.

"Mr. Blanchet, of course. They tell me that he has left the country—gone to America, they say. He has gone to the far West; that is in America, is it not?"

"But is this true?" Lucy asked. Her pale face coloured at the mention of the luckless poet's name. It had bitter associations for her.

"It is true, Lucy dear," her mother answered, looking at the girl with kindly, tender eyes; "I had not time to tell you about it," she added significantly, meaning that she had not desired to bring up his name unnecessarily to poor Lucy. "He was anxious to go; he thought he could make a career for himself out there, and he was anxious to get out of this anyhow; and I spoke to your papa, and papa thought he had

much better go as soon as possible; and he helped him all he could, with letters of introduction and all that; and he has taken his sister with him, and he is gone, my dear."

The helper of unhappy men did not mention the fact that the assistance she and her husband had given to Blanchet was not by any means confined to mere letters of introduction, although of these too he had goodly store.

Lucy withdrew to the window, and looked listlessly out. The poor poet! Once she admired him greatly; and the memories came back of that pleasant girlish time when he was a hero and a sort of god in her eyes. Lately, when he had acted with such treachery, and brought about such strange confusion, she had found some excuse for him because she fancied that perhaps it was disappointed love for her that had made him try to set her against Heron; and although the result had been so sad for her, yet what woman during all the centuries before and since Lady Anne was born would not look with more lenient eye upon the treacheries that were done for love of her? There was something of added loneliness in the knowledge that he too had passed beyond the horizon of her history.

"We hope he will do well in America," Mrs. Money said, "and perhaps become a great man one day, and come back to Europe and see his friends, who will be proud of his success, I am sure."

Lucy came forward again, and stood as it were in her mother's shadow. Lady Limpenny began again complacently:

"So you see, Lucy, darling, I was not wrong in all

my news, and your mother knew this as well as I did. You see everybody is going away; and our young friend too with the odd, pretty name, the girl with all the lovely hair, you know—the hair that you tell me is really all her own. What is that pretty girl's odd name? I ought to remember it, I am sure."

Mrs. Money would much rather this pretty girl's name had not been brought up just then. But there was no escaping Lady Limpenny, and she quietly answered:

"You mean Miss Grey, Laura—Minola Grey?"

"Yes, to be sure; how could I forget that sweet, pretty, odd name? Minola Grey, of course. And she too has gone away and never means to come back any more, I am told."

"Minola Grey gone away?" Lucy asked in genuine astonishment. "It can't be, Lady Limpenny; why should she go away, mamma? Do you know anything of this too?"

"No, my dearest," her mother said; "I know nothing at all about it. Are you certain, Laura? It looks so unlikely, you know, that Minola Grey could go anywhere without letting us know something about it."

"Quite certain, darling Theresa. I have only just been at the young lady's lodgings, and so ridiculous I did seem, you can't think—oh! you really can't!"

Lucy looked as if she found no difficulty in thinking of Lady Limpenny making herself seem ridiculous.

"Because," Lady Limpenny explained, in answer to enquiring looks from Mrs. Money, "the very moment I got to the door I forgot the dear young lady's name.

I could not remember it. I could only ask for the young lady. But of course they knew whom I meant, for there was no other young lady living there."

"Well, but about her—about Minola?" Mrs. Money asked with a little impatience.

"About her? Oh! yes, yes, to be sure. Well, my dear, they told me she had left that place and left London; and that they did not expect her back any more; they thought she was going to live abroad somewhere—Italy, I think."

"This is extraordinary," Lucy said. "I can't understand it, mamma; I'll go at once and see if Minola has really gone."

"You'll find it all true, darling," Lady Limpenny affirmed, with a grave shake of the head. At first it did not seem to her a matter of great interest, for she assumed that Miss Grey had simply gone to live on the Continent with the knowledge of her friends. But now that there was evidently some mystery about it, she was disposed to make the utmost possible of the mystery, and to plume herself considerably on having been the first to find out the strange thing's occurrence. The truth was that Lady Limpenny had gone first to see Minola in the hope that, under pretence of paying her a gracious and friendly visit, she could induce Minola to tell her more about the Moneys and their present purposes than they would be likely to tell of themselves. Lady Limpenny was really very fond of the Moneys in her own way; but she could not resist the anxiety to find out, if possible, something more about their affairs than they would wish to have known, especially since these affairs had become just now matter of rather common speculation. In Lady Limpenny's eyes,

a friend was Mr. Money; a greater friend was Mrs. Money; but the greatest friend of all was, the truth—about their private affairs.

There was nothing more to be got now, however, about the affairs of the Moneys or of anybody else, and Lucy had announced her intention of going to find out something about Miss Grey. It was in Lady Limpenny's mind to offer her companionship, when a card was brought to Mrs. Money, who handed it to Lucy, saying significantly, "Mr. Sheppard, my dear;" and Lady Limpenny decided at once to remain and see this visitor, about whom she had heard a great deal, and whom, from Mrs. Money's look, she at once assumed to be in some way an object of especial interest at the present moment.

Mr. Sheppard looked remarkably pale and perturbed when he entered the room. He had of late become well known to Mrs. Money, who always regarded him with a peculiar interest since the day, now seeming so long ago, when she heard from Mary Blanchet that he was a lover of Minola Grey. She knew too that her husband lately had leaned to the side of Sheppard as a possible husband for Minola, while she herself had in secret preferred the cause of Herbert Blanchet. She did not doubt that Mr. Sheppard's present visit had something to do with Minola and the strange story Lady Limpenny had been telling.

Mr. Sheppard explained that he had not at first had any intention of intruding on the ladies—no emotion or surprise could make him forego his formalism of manner—but that as he found Mr. Money was not at home, he had taken the liberty of paying them a visit. Both ladies expressed themselves as greatly de-

lighted. Mr. Sheppard did not get much further, however, except into such matters as the weather and the debates in Parliament, and Mrs. Money made no effort to draw him into any closer converse. Lady Limpenny penetrated the meaning of this with that remarkable astuteness on which she prided herself, and which she was convinced could never be deceived. "They won't speak before me," she said in her own mind. "It's something very serious and shocking; Miss Grey has gone off and married some dreadful person; or something has occurred which they don't want me to know. But I'll find it all out."

She had nothing better for it at the moment, however, than to take her leave, which she did with many vows that they must all see a great deal of each other before they left England.

"Lady Limpenny is a very dear old friend of mine, Mr. Sheppard," Mrs. Money explained, "but I did not wish to speak of anything concerning some of our friends in the presence even of her. You have come to tell us something about a very dear friend, Mr. Sheppard, have you not?"

"I have come rather to ask you for some information about a very dear friend," Sheppard said, with white and trembling lips, as he rose from his seat and came near Mrs. Money. "I have come to ask you if you can tell me anything about Miss Grey?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Sheppard, I am sorry to say. I thought you had come to relieve our anxiety. Is this true, this story we have just been hearing—is it true that she has left London?"

Sheppard looked from one woman's face to the other. He was always naturally suspicious, and at first

he could not believe it possible that they two were not in some plot against him.

"Don't you really know?" he asked. "Don't either of you ladies really know? Don't you know where she has gone, nor why, nor anything about her? Is it possible she can have gone away from London and you not know?"

"I never heard a word about it until a moment ago," Mrs. Money said. "I am all in amazement, Mr. Sheppard; I really felt sure that you knew, and were coming with some explanation from her, perhaps." Mrs. Money had begun to think that perhaps for some inscrutable reason Minola might have consented to marry Mr. Sheppard, and gone down into the country or to Scotland to do it.

"From her," Sheppard said, with a sickly smile; "oh, no! I shall never be entrusted with a message from her. I only want to know now who is the person likely to be entrusted with such a message. I want you ladies to let me know the worst at once, if you can; it isn't any kindness to keep it from me."

Mrs. Money only repeated her assurances and her wonder. Lucy was standing with her eyes looking on the ground, and a faint colour in her cheeks. She did not know anything indeed, but she suspected that Minola's disappearance could in any case bode little good to the hopes of poor Sheppard. Mrs. Money glanced at her daughter with wondering, pitying eyes.

Sheppard turned to Lucy: "You were her friend, Miss Money—her dearest friend. It is impossible she can have left London for good without your knowing something of why she has done so. She could not be ungrateful; nobody that knew her could believe that

of her. She must have told you—and you may tell me something. Don't think me rude or pressing; you can hardly understand my feelings, but still I would ask you to make allowance for them."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Sheppard!" said Lucy gently, her eyes filling with tears, "I can perhaps understand your feelings; or, at least, I can make allowance for them. But I can't tell you why Nola has gone away, if she has gone away. She has not told me anything; only I am sure it was with some good purpose, and because she thought she was doing right—or was in some one's way—oh, indeed, I can't explain, and can hardly guess! But I do sympathise with you, Mr. Sheppard, if you will allow me to speak to you plainly and like a friend—and indeed—indeed, there is no use in your thinking of Nola. Don't be angry, mamma, and think that I am talking as a girl oughtn't to talk; I know what I am saying, and I would spare Mr. Sheppard useless pain if I could. Ah!——"

With a start and this exclamation she turned away, for a servant at that moment brought her a letter, and she saw that it was in the handwriting of Minola Grey. She left the room without saying another word.

"Your daughter knows something which she will not tell," Mr. Sheppard said gloomily.

"No," Mrs. Money answered; "she said she knew nothing; but she guesses something, perhaps, which she does not think it right to tell. It would be of no use asking her any more questions, Mr. Sheppard; and she is a good deal disturbed at present."

"Certainly, certainly," Mr. Sheppard hastened to say; "I am quite aware of that: and I have to apologise again for intruding upon you and her at such a

time. I may perhaps be allowed to congratulate her and you on the happy marriage she is about to make with one who is so certain of distinction; and indeed I had some hopes, perhaps, that her own happiness would render her only more ready to sympathise with one to whom the fates have been less kind."

"Allow me to remove a misconception, Mr. Sheppard," Mrs. Money said, turning her deep eyes on him and speaking in tones of double-distilled melancholy. "My daughter is not about to be married; she is going to Russia with us; any reports you may have heard to the contrary are entirely untrue."

"But—I beg your pardon," the aghast Sheppard asked; "is it possible?—is it not true that Miss Money is to be married to Mr. Heron?"

"It is not true, Mr. Sheppard; distinctly not true. Whatever thoughts of that kind may once have existed, exist, I can assure you, no longer. Miss Money is not going to marry anyone—at present, at least; she is going to Russia with her father and me."

"Then I see it all! I need not ask any more explanations, and I have only to beg pardon again for having intruded upon you. I see it all now only too clearly; I see that I have thrown away half my life for nothing, and been made a fool of all the time—and this is the end!"

Mrs. Money looked at him in wonder. He was white with anger and excitement. She did not understand him in the least. She had not yet been told the full reason of the breaking-off of the engagement between Lucy and Heron, and knew no more than that Lucy now thought she did not care about him. Her mind was therefore filled with a certain pity for the

discarded lover whom she pictured as suffering greatly in secret, and the meaning of Sheppard's words was lost on her. When with a formal bow he quitted the room, she could only think that his disappointment in love must have somewhat disturbed his brain.

Mr. Sheppard went and walked the Victoria Embankment for hours. He was very angry, bitter, and miserable; and yet he was in his secret heart longing to know the worst. He began to be ashamed of the manner in which his life was wasting away in fruitless pursuit of a girl who he now saw could not be made to care for him. If the worst were over he thought he would begin to shake off some of his passion and be like a man again. The worst in his eyes was what he now felt an almost perfect assurance that he was soon destined to hear—the news that Minola Grey and Victor Heron had been married. Why they should have chosen to do this in secret, and by means of a sort of flight, instead of in the open light of day, Mr. Sheppard could not guess; but he felt sure that that would be, or was already, the end of all that long chapter of his existence. How much of his passion had been pure, unselfish love, and how much the eager desire of a self-conceited and ambitious man to succeed in something he had greatly set his heart upon, Mr. Sheppard did not himself know, and had never asked of his consciousness. There were moments, as we know, but as he did not know, when perhaps, if chance had set him on to say the right word, or even to present himself at the right instant, he might have found himself in possession of his dearest hope; and made some one else, and perhaps himself, unhappy for life. But the fates had been in league with himself against

him; and he was at last growing weary of the long pursuit in which, like the people in a dream who fain would run but cannot, he found some vague, insuperable obstruction always keeping him back. He was growing ashamed of himself. It was not in his nature voluntarily and manfully to give up so long as there seemed to him the faintest possibility that in any moment of good fortune on his side, or of weakness on Minola's, he might yet be successful. But in that bitter evening of disappointment and rage which followed his visit to Mrs. Money, he did think many a time that it would be a relief to him when the worst was known; that he would become a different man when all this tormenting hope and futile struggle was at an end; and that he might be able to take up his life again and turn it to better purpose. It will be a source of consolation to all tender natures to know, that after all Mr. Sheppard is not likely to die of a broken heart even if he should lose Minola Grey.

Meanwhile Lucy in her room had read the letter from Minola. It was a letter which it had cost much pain to write and surely gave much pain to read. It was full of the proud humiliation of a spirit that not willingly humbles itself, but which, brought face to face with the duty, does it to the full. Only one who like Lucy knew already most of the story it had to tell could well have understood all or half it meant to say. Minola took much for granted; she was speaking only to the heart of her friend. She spoke in the briefest manner possible of her meeting with Heron in the Park, and of what Blanchet had told Lucy and had told her about it. She assumed that Lucy would know there was nothing in that chance meeting of

which anyone had to be ashamed—except indeed the unworthy friend who had misconstrued it, and over him, too, Minola passed with the fewest words. What the letter was meant to tell was that Minola had determined to leave England, and not to return for many, many years; making no pretence at concealment of the truth that she did so because of an unhappy, a long-cherished, and a long-hidden love. Long since she would have gone away, Minola said, but that she dreaded to have her secret guessed at, and believed she could otherwise conceal it for ever. So far as the letter told, it was but the unhappy love of the writer for a man she could not marry. No word in it hinted at the possibility of the unhappy love being unhappily too well returned. Minola's only thought still was to keep Lucy and Victor Heron together.

“So now, dear, dear Lucy, good-bye. I shall only be a day or two more at Keeton, and shall merely rush through London on my way outwards, so that I shan't see you any more for the present. But we shall meet again some time, when I have got over all this, and am not ashamed of myself or of you any more; and we shall be friends, as we are. I could say ever so much more, but to what end, dear? I leave you to do with my wretched secret as you please; to hide it or proclaim it just as you like; only I can't claim for this mood of mind even the courage of desperation or the merit of self-inflicted penance, for I know well enough all the time how very safe it is in your dear little kindly hands. Say whatever you think right for me in the way of good-byes and of good wishes to your father, and mother, and sister, and to anyone else you think fit; you could not possibly say

anything too strong in the way of affection and gratitude from me to all who are close to you and whom you love.

“Always, dear Lucy, your friend,
“NOLA.”

As soon as she could do anything for her tears Lucy sat down and wrote a few lines to Victor Heron, telling him that Nola was at Keeton, and that if he went there at once he might find her before she left England, and bidding him go to her, and wishing her and him all happiness. This letter she gave to a servant, telling him to take a hansom cab and find Mr. Heron wherever he was, and give it to him. Then Lucy quietly came downstairs and sat by her mother's side, and whispered to her:

“Mamma, I am ready to go to Russia now any time. I think we shall be much happier there than here.”

The letter found Victor Heron in a sort of despair. He had written to Minola, and got no answer; he had gone to her old place, and found that his letter was still lying there. Nothing was known of Minola, except that she had left London, that she was not expected there any more, and that it was supposed she had gone to live “in France, or Italy, or somewhere;” and that Mary Blanchet had gone with her brother to America.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Where I did Begin, there shall I End."

WHEN Minola began to realise the fact that Mary Blanchet had actually left her, and that she was now for the first time alone in very deed, an utter sense of desolation came over her. It showed itself first in the shape of complete inaction. She sat down and moodily thought, and seemed to have nothing else to do. She had never before understood how completely helpless a woman may become, nor how much she is compelled by the necessities of her being, or by the social laws, or by all together, to be a dependent creature. The falling-off of Mary Blanchet seemed to be the last blow. She had now not a friend left in London, not a friend indeed in the world, to whom she could turn for guidance or comfort. The mere physical sense of loneliness was something hardly to be borne.

She ought to have found consolation, perhaps sufficient, in the knowledge that she had done no wrong, and that her troubles, such as they were, had not been the result of any fault of hers. But it is to be feared that Minola did not belong to that class of persons whose well-regulated minds can always show them when they have done no wrong, and who can therefore wrap themselves up in their comfortable mantle of self-satisfaction and go to sleep, as Byron did on the deck of the vessel when the storm was raging and he found that he could neither help nor hinder. Minola kept racking her mind to know whether she had not in some way done wrong, and been thus to blame for the troubles that had come on her

and on so many of her friends. She felt as if in some way she must have done wrong to Lucy Money. Even when she found herself breaking into tears at the defection of Mary Blanchet, she went on asking herself whether there must not be something strangely defective in her own nature, seeing that she could not keep even poor Mary, for whom she had done so much, still faithful to her.

One thing was clear to her during all her depression; and it was that, as soon as she could rally enough of mental strength to do anything, she must efface herself from the association of the few friends she had known in London. She must absolutely take herself away from those to whom her presence henceforth could only be an embarrassment. All her scheme of lonely and proud independence had been a disastrous failure; and her only business now was to get out of it with the least harm to those she still so much loved. If she were absolutely gone out of sight and reach of Lucy and Heron, all, she thought, might yet come right. The suddenly discovered love of Heron and her, too early seen unknown and known too late, would be but an episode in his life, to be looked back upon hereafter with kindly, unembittered emotion. For herself she should at least have always the sweet memory that she had loved and been loved when she was young.

She prepared, therefore, after one miserable night, for what she called effacing herself. She had determined to go and live in Rome. It became more and more an idea of hers that she would be able to find peace in Rome—that refuge to which so many sick hearts are always turning, they know not why. But in

the mean time there must be arrangements made for enabling her project of living at Rome to be conveniently carried out. The best thing, therefore, that she could think of was to go down to Keeton and consult the lawyer in the hands of whose firm the yet unarranged affairs of her father and herself remained. She had a pleasant recollection of a motherly, kindly woman, his wife, who showed a deep interest in her during her last visit to Dukes-Keeton—that visit which was fraught with such momentous consequences. She thought, too, she would be glad to have a look at Keeton for the last time; it should, she felt resolved, be the very last time. Wherever she might go afterwards, whether she remained in Rome or wandered on to some other resting-place, she was determined that she would not return to England. She remembered one or two pleasant girls in the lawyer's house; and she thought that they would help her among them to make her arrangements, and get her some intelligent, well-brought-up Keeton lass, who would like to travel and see the world, and be her maid and companion, and who would have no brother, or sweetheart, or other male attraction of any kind whose memory must be dragged at each remove a lengthening chain. It would not take long to make these arrangements, and then she would efface herself from England for ever.

She would write, of course, to Lucy and to her mother. But not, she thought, until she was fairly out of London, and so far on her way to her project of self-exile. It would be idle to try to ignore what had happened, and to go to see the Moneys and try to make them believe, or to seem as if they believed, that she was leaving England simply because she had

taken a whim for travel. All that would be absurd now. For her own sake and the sake of all others concerned she had only to go out of England as soon as possible, and begin for the second time a new life. Her arrangements for leaving town were soon made; and one soft spring evening she found herself straining her eyes from the window of a railway carriage for a last look at the London of her dreams and hopes.

She found in Keeton all the welcome and kindness she had expected. She had no trouble in making her arrangements to go to Rome. She even went and paid a visit of friendly farewell to Mr. Saulsbury, and was civilly received, and tried at first to think the civility was warmth. But it soon grew plain, even to her disturbed powers of observation, that Mr. Saulsbury regarded her resolve to visit Rome as only a preliminary to her passing over altogether to the faith of Rome, and therefore could not bring himself to receive her on any terms of cordiality. He seemed now such an absurd old person to Minola, that she wondered how she could ever have been so foolish as to have any misunderstanding with him, or to complain of anything he said or did.

She left him, never in all probability to see him again. He felt convinced that he had impressed her rather profoundly at this their final interview, and trusted that even in Rome itself some of his severe admonitions might remain in her memory and ring in her ears.

She wrote to Lucy the letter we have already heard of; and then she began to feel as if she had taken leave of all the breathing world, and were about to enter a tomb. If she had ever been of the faith which

so alarmed poor Mr. Saulsbury, it is certain that she would have gone to Rome with the resolve to shelter herself within one of its sanctuaries.

A day or two passed away; and she was almost on the eve of her going. She meant to travel so as to reach London at night, and only to drive from one station to another, and cross to the Continent at once. She got out a map of Rome many a time and tried to study it, as once she used to study the map of London, in order that when she arrived there she might not be a stranger. But she could not recall the old spirit; and for fellow-traveller now she had not her friend Mary Blanchet, but a pretty and red-cheeked Keeton girl, who felt no manner of curiosity about Rome or any other place.

One farewell she had to make, which could not be dispensed with. She must see the park and the mausoleum for the last time. She must be alone there. She must sit once more on the steps of that monument, and think of the past days there, and say it a good-bye for ever. She had been very sad there, and the sadness endeared it to her now; she had had sweet dreams and bright hopes there, and the place where they had floated round her was sanctified like the spot where some ones we have loved lie buried.

It was a calm, beautiful evening as she passed through the streets in Keeton and into the park. The business of the town, such as it was, was still going on, and she knew that she was likely to have the trees all to herself for more than an hour to come. She went on to the mausoleum and met no one.

The voices of the woods were sweet, musical, and melancholy in her ears. She allowed the influence of

the scene and its memories to sink into her soul. As she sat on the steps of the monument, she seemed to pass through a series of experiences as long drawn out as those of the Persian king in the story, who during his moment's plunge in the water lived whole years of trial, and toil, and love, and loss. It was strange, and sweet, to close her eyes, and in the murmur of the trees to fancy that she heard the laugh of her brother as he and she played together in the old time that now for the moment seemed to-day again. Then there came back to recollection her girlish days; her romantic fancies and hopes; the heroes of her imaginary, harmless loves; the weary home-life when no one within the four walls that were assumed to constitute her home appeared to care for her any more. And then Mary Blanchet, so kind, and quaint, and good! Ah! but if our lonely heroine meant to enjoy the dreamy, half-sensuous delight of her hour among the trees and the associations of her childhood, she ought not to have allowed any memory of Mary Blanchet to steal in among the recollections; for with that name came all the rest: came the names of the friends she had lost; came with such intensity of regret the thought of the one man whom she had so deeply loved, and whom she must never see more. One little moment of acknowledged love, one moment with a bitterness of secrecy and shame mingled in its passionate, fleeting joy—and this was all, and all was over; and she was going away to lead a lonely life of renunciation and repression, and never to know one ray of happy love. It was hard; she was so very young. She covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a passion of tears. But her tears, even in their starting, brought a

new and painful memory with them—the memory of the day when she sat on those very steps before, and was resolved to leave Keeton, and go to be independent and happy in London; and when poor Sheppard came up through these very trees and tried to make her love him. Her heart was softened to him now. He and she were in a manner companions in misfortune. She reproached herself now for having been cold, and sarcastic, and bitter to him that day. She wondered how she could have found it in her heart to be so hard and unkind to anyone who loved; and she felt inclined to own that she deserved any fate that might have come on her since she had been so unsympathetic with others. She still kept her head down and her face hidden in her hands, and was ashamed, reluctant to look up and meet the soft, unpitying brightness of the sun. But she suddenly seemed to hear a sound among the trees that made her start, and she raised her face all flushed and tear-stained as it was, and, with her eyes glittering in grief and alarm, looked eagerly to see if anyone was coming, and if she must fly from her refuge. The last day when she sat in tears there, she was disturbed by the coming of poor Sheppard. He at least was not near to trouble her now. Yet her face kept its shamed and startled expression. Her quick ears had surely caught some sound which did not belong to the rustlings and murmurings of the woods, every distinct voice of which she knew and could assign to the oak, or the beech, or the chestnut, or the plane that owned it. She stood up, ready to escape if anyone should be coming. Yes, surely that was the decided, rapid sound of some one approaching through the wood. She stood in startled

attitude, ready for flight, looking more handsome even than usual in her embarrassment and alarm. Up through that very path before her came poor Sheppard that day. See, there actually was some one coming—a man; she could see him plainly. He was far enough away yet to allow her to make the most dignified retreat possible before he could reach the steps of the mausoleum. Did she try to escape? No; she stood still; still as a statue, although not indeed so pale—her face crimsoned with wonder, dread, insane hope, all unspeakable emotion. "Am I losing my reason?" she asked. She did not know whether to advance or escape now; and she could not stand any longer, but sat or fell on the steps of the mausoleum, and waited there for what was to happen. For there was no longer any possibility of mistake or doubt; and it was Victor Heron himself who was coming with rapid steps towards her.

He was breathless when he came up to her.

"I knew I should find you here," he said, and he flung himself on the steps of the mausoleum beside her.

"Where is Lucy—has anything happened?" she stammered.

"Many things have happened that concern you and me; I'll tell you all, only I must say this first—I am free to tell you how I love you, and to ask you to forgive me for not saying this long ago, when I ought to have known it; and I have so much to say—and——" and seated beside her he threw his arm round her, and tried to draw her towards him.

"But Lucy, where is Lucy?" Minola asked, still endeavouring to retain her self-command and to withdraw from his clasp.

"It was Lucy who told me you were here, and sent me to you. No, Minola, you shall not get away from me now; no more cross-purposes! I have come for you. You do love me? You will not send me away? No; I'll never leave you again."

"I was going away," said Minola, trembling, and still bewildered, and hardly knowing what she and he were saying. "I was going away to Rome for ever, to avoid you all, and leave you and Lucy to be happy and free;" and the tears came into her eyes again, and she could not say any more.

"Oh, you shan't go to Rome, or anywhere, unless I go with you!" he said; "but I have so much to tell you. Can you listen now, and understand, do you think?"

"Oh, yes, I can; I am not so absurd!" she answered; feeling, nevertheless, very absurd—if it is absurd to be greatly agitated under the influence of a sudden hope that even yet seems a bewildering impossibility.

Then he began to explain in a very rapid and incoherent manner, and with his natural vivacity and impetuosity intensified a hundred-fold by the emotions of the moment. Much of what he said only she could well have followed or even guessed at; some of it she allowed to pass by without quite understanding it. The burden of it all was clear, however: Lucy had found out that she did not really love him, and the breaking off of the engagement had come from her and her father. Heron was absolutely free.

They talked together for a long time. It was strange; he did not, after the few hurried utterances of the first breathless moment, say one word about their becoming man and wife. That was understood and

settled somehow without any further speech. Only when he had done his explanation, and made repeated protestations of his sorrow for his own blindness and stupidity, and had declared half-a-dozen times over that she was the most generous creature living to forgive him and endure him, he at last drew her to him and kissed her—and their compact was made.

There were many little intervals of silence. Now that the first rush of surprise and emotion was over, the lovers were rather shy of each other in their new relations.

"I am distressed about Lucy in all this," Minola said. "I wish she could be happy as well as I."

Then she became thoughtful, and glanced inquiringly into Heron's face. She wondered if he had any glimpse of the suspicion that was strong in her mind, and that filled her eyes with new tears, and made her think of Lucy as a heroine of romance and a benefactress. No, he had clearly no such thought.

"Dear, sweet, brave little Lucy!" broke from Minola's lips.

"Yes, yes," Victor said, looking up with sparkling eyes, "wasn't it spirited and sensible of her? She found that she really could not care about me, and she had the courage and truthfulness to say so. Why, another girl would have been afraid of being thought fickle, and would just have let the thing go on and made us both unhappy for life."

Minola remained silent for a moment. Some day, she thought, she would speak with him of all that again, but not now.

"I have to go back to town to-night," he said. "I shall leave Keeton at seven, and be in the House in time for the division."

"I think," she said hesitatingly, "I should like to go to Rome still; I should like to be away from London and from all the people we know for a little."

Heron thought for a moment.

"It would be better, perhaps," he said decisively. "I shall be free in a few days, and I will go to you there. Besides, how glorious to be married in Rome!"

She did not speak. Her heart and eyes were too full. After a moment she rose.

"We must go," she said.

They both looked round them at the scene, the trees, the paths, the mausoleum, in silence. Victor, however, gave his looks after a moment to her upturned beautiful face.

"You are happy, dearest?" he asked, not doubtfully, but for reassurance of the happiness he felt.

"Oh, yes, only too happy! I cannot realise it—yet."

"And you don't dislike men any more?"

"No," she answered with a brightening face; and added, "Nor women either," for she was still thinking of Lucy.

"No more Miss Misanthrope?" he said, and he drew her towards him again.

"No more," she replied, with a blush and a smile; and, hardly knowing what she did, she kissed him.

Then he gently drew her arm within his, and, as the evening was beginning to fall, they went out of the park together.

THE END.

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